

EARLY MODERN CULTURE AND THE ECONOMY OF MASOCHISM

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2013

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Cornell University 2013

In this project, I examine the relationship between pain and pleasure on the early modern stage. I argue that this dynamic can be called a kind of proto-masochism. I also claim that this new form of masochism takes its logic and much of its language from the emerging early modern market. I chart the course of this development by reading a number of early modern plays and poems. I begin with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, discussing how Jessica and Antonio both express masochistic desire in different ways. I then turn to the notion of wittols – willing and eager cuckolds – in Middleton's *A Chaste Maid In Cheapside*. I finally end the project by discussing Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, a play that forges a masochistic relationship between the audience and stage, and hints at the idea of masochistic spectatorship.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew Dominic Bucemi is a Ph.D candidate at Cornell University in the department of English Language and Literature. He has specialized in early modern drama, and is interested in film, new media, and teaching.

I would like to acknowledge my friends, family, and special committee, for all of their warmth, support, and understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

Early modernity and the history of masochism

Masochism is one of the most contested and controversial topics in contemporary discussions about sex, desire, and psychology. Medical doctors, feminist theorists, psychoanalysts, and actual masochists have debated whether masochism is an oppressive or liberating experience. While some groups claim it is a powerful expression of personal agency, others argue that it is a deeply homophobic and misogynist practice. The extensive scholarship on masochism alternately asserts that it is subversive, acting to undermine existing systems of power, or is an insidious tool of power, an articulation of the most fundamentally conservative traditions. Writers, thinkers and activists are at odds about whether masochism is tragic and shameful or one of the only true sources of sexual gratification available to people in modern society. There is some further confusion about what constitutes masochism: when and how does masochism express itself? Is sadism necessary for masochism to exist? Can the two concepts operate apart from one another, or is a sadist always required for a masochist to feel pleasure? This is even more complicated by the fact that sadism and masochism are not concretely defined terms, and may have different meanings according to context.¹ In the wake of these debates and confusions, Victor Taylor asserts that there is not “one theoretical perspective that adequately discerns all configurations of an S&M dynamic.”² Masochism, it would appear, is much too variable and complicated to properly define; it seems impossible to come to any

¹ “Contracting Masochism: Pain, Pleasure, and the Language of Power.” *One Hundred Years of Masochism: Literary Texts, Social and Cultural Contexts*. Eds. Finke, Michael and Carl Niekerk (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) 54

critical, theoretical or practical consensus on what masochism ultimately means. The first stage of my project will attempt to, instead, paint the contours of how masochism has been conceived and how people have thought of and tried to explain it.

This project hopes not only to paint these contours but to suggest where they originated and to chart something of their historical development. If I locate much of these origins in the early modern period and particularly in England, I do not want to assert that masochism is an English phenomenon or to make a polemical claim that early modernity birthed masochism. I want to, instead, present a reading of early modern English life that demonstrates how it suggests and is ultimately implicated in the multifaceted understanding of masochism that we have today. I argue that the early modern period had a unique approach to the concepts of pleasure and pain, and that early modern persons found many avenues through which to depict pain as a pleasurable experience. This approach came from several sources: a classical and medieval tradition that praised pain as essential for inner purity; a recent philosophical trend that saw cruelty as beneficial to the social good; and a theatrical culture that constantly staged scenes of horrific violence and psychological turmoil that were supposed to be pleasurable for the audience but also pleasurable for the characters who experienced these dramatic events. I also argue that this sense of pleasurable pain was influenced by the rise of the market, and that the logic and language of the market offered a new way of thinking about personal identity and what – or how – a person should feel about the negative events of everyday life.

I will bring these diverse backgrounds together in an attempt to address the

² Ibid.

very complicated question of why an early modern person might want to watch a play that would make him or her feel bad. Cynthia Marshall asks a similar question about *King Lear*: struggling to explain how the play's depressing action must have affected its first audiences, she asks "what sort of explanation can it be to assert that Shakespeare's viewers willfully chose to endure an emotionally devastating few hours?"³ The early modern theater is, in fact, a very potent forum for masochistic images: early modern dramas are filled with characters that willingly and even happily abuse themselves, and audiences consistently subjected themselves to sequences that were almost literally painful to watch. The way that dramatic characters abuse themselves is sometimes emotional or spiritual, but it is often physical and even fatal, and they are regularly pleased about sticking swords in their chests, slitting their wrists, and drinking poison. They even experience pleasure when they are harmed by others – when they are humiliated, beaten, and tortured. They regard this pain with a kind of religious fervor and an almost orgasmic ecstasy, reveling in the fact that they are suffering. Masochism, as psychoanalysis conceptualizes it in the middle of the twentieth century, is a highly theatrical, heavily scripted form of desire; it relies on a series of performances, props, costumes and set pieces in order to fully express itself. It is not simply about being hurt and finding that pleasurable: masochists need the scene to look right, need their abuser to say or even wear the right thing, need the specific people to be watching on as they are injured. Masochists are harmed as part of their sexual practice, but this harming is usually under their personal control and arranged by them in advance. It might be no surprise, then, that the same characters

³ *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns

who enjoy being injured and tortured are often the playwright figures in their respective dramas; they call the shots from the background, directing the action and designing the scenes in which they appear and are brutalized. These characters are prescient examples of the way that masochism would develop as a discourse over the next three centuries, and I use drama as an important example in pinpointing the early modern period as a key moment in the evolution of masochism. I focus my attention on a number of city comedies, a genre that shares this project's interests in pleasure and pain.

My other focus in this project is on the development of the early modern market and the cultural implications of nascent capitalism. I draw attention to the fact that dramatic depictions of pleasurable pain often relied on the language of the market; characters express their proto-masochistic feelings through economic metaphors, describing their desire in terms of value, currency, sale, contract, ownership, and property. Early modern England's cultural and social shifts were deeply impacted by the rise of the market; Martha Howell argues that the market became a central language in the period's "search for meaning."⁴ I argue that this is especially relevant to the way that masochism grew and mutated as a discourse and a practice: Gilles Deleuze, whose work will be an essential context for my thinking about masochism, affirms that any expression of masochistic desire requires a set of "contractual relations"⁵ and economic guarantees in order to legitimate it. Deleuze argues that masochists desire to be thought of as pieces of property that can be bought, sold and

Hopkins University Press, 2002) 1

⁴ "The Language of Property in Early Modern Europe." *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*. Ed. Henry S. Turner. (New York: Routledge, 2002) 18

exchanged; they become anonymous products that are manhandled by their owners. I submit that the gestating concept of masochism found, in the early modern market, a perfect companion. The emergence of the market meant that people began to see themselves in terms of worth and value; they had this much or that much capital, and this capital made them worth this much or that much as a person. If a person could only be worth so much, it is possible that he might be worth nothing at all, and this is exactly the kind of logic that is essential to masochistic desire. The early modern theater was fascinated by this new and very alienating way of thinking about identity, and early modern dramas constantly staged scenes that dramatized the relationship between ordinary people and the market. This was particularly evident in city comedies, a fact that I highlight in the chapters that follow my introduction.

I argue that masochism would become one of the major ways that pleasure works in a capitalist context. Capitalism teaches that your body is something that can be manipulated, stomped on, tortured, and destroyed in the name of getting the latest products and all of the pleasure that these products will bring you. There is something masochistic about capitalism; both of these dynamics are based on the idea that the pressures of modern life can become fodder for personal pleasure, and that what looks oppressive and unpalatable can actually be the raw material for getting you what you want. I do not want to argue that masochism as we know it is entirely something new – self-flagellating or ascetic monks are just one example of the existence of the concept of pleasurable pain before the early modern period. I want to claim, instead, that the rise of the early modern market marked a pivotal development in the idea of

⁵ *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, 6th Edition. (Cambridge, MA: Zone, 1991) 20

pleasurable pain. This is because the market gave this form of pleasure the language to express itself: anonymity, alienation, and the concept of personal value. Masochism also received an equal inheritance from the early modern theater: this is particularly evident in the theater's interest in characters who script the action of the plays they are starring in, molding the plot to suit their own desires. I will discuss the theatricality of masochism in more detail at the end of this introduction, and will write at greater length on this theme in my fourth chapter.

I feel that it is important to be clear about one of my central terms before I continue with my overview of the dissertation. I will, throughout the project, use the term "the market" when discussing the early modern period's emergent capitalism. When I use this term, I am referring to the dynamics that make up everyday life in a market-driven society: debts, lending money, buying property, signing contracts, and interacting with an understanding of personal value that is linked to how much money you have and how much you are "worth" in an economic sense. I will continually refer to these dynamics throughout my entire project: these economic processes are at the heart of all the masochistic desires that I will explore in the next four chapters. The market is in effect whenever a character spends money, makes a trade, or refers to his property and the goods that he has stocked up. These market scenes do not, however, always take place at an actual marketplace, and do not always involve the exchange of physical money or goods. What they do, instead, is evoke the market through allusions, jokes, and economic metaphors. This project deals with what might be called the little dramas of capitalist life: the moments in which you may not be directly dealing with the market, but in which the market has become a part of your language

and a perspective through which you see the world around you. This is especially evident in the masochistic characters that I will analyze in the next four chapters; these figures invite the imagery and logic of the market into their personal lives, and make that imagery and logic into key components of their erotic desires.

In this introduction, I will first provide an overview of early modern English society that focuses on corporeal punishment and the ubiquity of corrective violence. I will outline the development of the classical and medieval concept of punishment, drawing on work by medieval and early modern historians, and will argue that pain was characterized as something to be cultivated and prized. I will then turn to how these thoughts about pain and its benefits were expanded on and powerfully exploded by two writers working at the start of the sixteenth century, Machiavelli and Luther. I will perform a thorough close reading of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will*, presenting two sides of a similar argument. These thinkers both claim that ordinary people need to submit their lives to a higher power, and must trust that it has their best interests at heart. If this higher power is cruel, harsh, inhuman or unjust, ordinary people should remember that they are too lowly and unworthy to question the judgment of anyone above them. The cruelty exerted against them is, ultimately, for their own good. In Machiavelli's tract, this higher power is the secular prince, who must be cruel to his own subjects so that their kingdom remains well-ordered and peaceful. In Luther's work, the higher power is literally God, and any believer that questions God's justice as cruel or harsh is roundly condemned as an ingrate. This relationship to cruelty marks a transition point between medieval conceptions of cruelty and the early modern development of masochism that I am

charting in this project. These transition figures are helpful in the way that they provide so much of the logic of early modern masochism, but they are lacking a key feature: pleasure. I will conclude this chapter with an overview of recent work that has been done in psychoanalysis, feminist theory, cultural anthropology, and sex activism, detailing many recent theories about masochism pleasure. I will finally turn to the implications that masochistic pleasure has on the early modern theater; I argue that because the theater so often and so expertly combined the notions of pain and pleasure, it was the perfect forum for expressing masochistic desires and for developing the specifics of a new kind of masochistic logic.

My goal in this project has several dimensions. Firstly, I want to explore the history of a sexual discourse and practice that we largely consider to be a modern development. I want us to question some of the assumptions that we make when we talk about masochism and when we talk about the history of sexuality in general; these assumptions can sometimes become stale and too easily held, and I want to introduce some fresh texts and perspectives into the discussion. Secondly, I want to offer a reading of the pervasive violence, both emotional and physical, that dominates the early modern stage. Pain is one of the most ubiquitous forces in these early modern dramas, which are filled with characters that experience incredible suffering. Characters lose their homes, parents, spouses and children; are violently tortured in graphic detail; and are forced to undergo the most degrading humiliations. They are also depicted deeply enjoying this suffering, articulating something almost like sexual gratification when they are abused or when they abuse themselves. I want to suggest one reason for why this theme was so eminently popular, and why early modern

playwrights turned to it over and over again. What were the cultural threads that made this popularity possible? Why was this an acceptable, appropriate and highly marketable topic? What were people reading, hearing and responding to that made these images palatable and even enjoyable? Why were these audiences willing to endure pain in their own right – to not only witness characters being tortured, but to be tortured themselves by sequences of great violence and brutality. One might imagine the audience wincing and flinching, or stirring uncomfortably in their seats, or moving back from the crowd gathered around the stage, needing some breathing room after witnessing a moment of particular intensity. How was this feeling enjoyable? How were audiences expected to like it, and how did they like it, as these plays were often frequented by thousands and even restaged to great success? I attempt to answer these questions in this project, or to at least suggest some possibilities for how we might begin to answer them. In the next section, I lay the groundwork for thinking about early modern England as a period that was conducive to the sort of proto-masochism I want to discuss.

Pain, Pleasure and Early Modern England

Susan Amussen asserts that early modern England has been understood as a “violent, unloving, and uncaring”⁶ era, a period with little regard for the sanctity of human life and a strikingly brutal approach to torture and bodily dismemberment. While this period saw a rise in literacy, the popularization of humanism and the flourishing of classical ideals, critics such as Lawrence Stone and Francis Barker have demonstrated that, in practice, the political and social reality of early modernity was

harsh and incredibly vicious. It is important to note, however, that this violence was not random, but was a deeply institutional and normalized occurrence. Public floggings, tortuous executions, and lengthy imprisonments were facts of life, a constant presence in urban centers and villages alike, and were the unsurprising consequence of illegal activity. If a crime was brutally punished, English citizens would not have been shocked; Amussen's research informs us that these citizens "expected correction to take place and knew that it involved violence."⁷ I do not want to claim that this punishment was never seen as disturbing or that no one ever protested its intensity or legitimacy – there was a rich and sometimes successful precedent for protesting the use corporeal punishment in individual cases⁸ – but it was rarely regarded as an evil in and of itself. The conventional wisdom held that punishment was necessary and that society would ultimately benefit from it. Punishment, torture and execution were seen as a way to purge negative elements from the social body; Jody Enders finds that medieval texts imagined "torture as a social curative"⁹ and consistently argued that the pains of physical correction were "a means of fostering health."¹⁰ For instance, Jerome claims that cruelty is justified if it heals the individual body, the social body or the larger body of the Church.¹¹ The early modern period became increasingly interested in this vision of punishment, especially as writers, theorists, doctors and scientists focused more and more on the physical

⁶ "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meaning of Violence in Early Modern England." The Journal of British Studies 34.1 (1995) 1

⁷ Ibid. 13

⁸ Ibid. 10

⁹ Enders, Jody. *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 181

¹⁰ Ibid. 183

human body, how it worked, and how it might be shaped and manipulated.¹² In this way, flogging a pickpocket or adulterer meant drumming the criminality out of his body; torturing and quartering a parricide meant erasing any memory that she ever existed, allowing the community to recover from the sickness that she represented.

There was a great deal of discussion, however, about just how much punishment was required in order to purge the sickness from an offending body. It could only be employed in particular cases, and the authority figure ordering punishment would have to justify that the crime merited physical discipline.¹³ There were crimes that did not warrant this sort of abuse, and these crimes were dealt with through fines, imprisonment, and less brutal forms of social shame. When it was employed, corporeal punishment could also only be so harsh and so painful; there were a number of what Daniel Baraz calls “quasi-scientific”¹⁴ studies that attempted to quantify and measure exactly how much punishment could be applied to someone in a given case. The violence and intensity of the punishment had to match the severity of the crime. Amussen states that corporeal punishment was only “legitimate when used by superiors against inferiors”¹⁵ – by a court, by a schoolmaster, by a husband, by a homeowner. It could not be used by just anyone, and it could certainly not be used against one's betters; if a man needed to be disciplined and rid of his criminality, he could not be beaten by his wife, children or servants, and only the justice system would have the right to beat, manhandle or impact his body. The right to purge society

¹¹ Baraz, Daniel. *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003) 17

¹² Ibid. 26

¹³ Amussen 13

¹⁴ *Medieval Cruelty* 171

of its negative elements fell exclusively to those in power, and this right could not be usurped by those without power. This fact scaled down through the line of social hierarchy, so that courts could punish anyone, wealthy men could beat lower-class men, men could beat their wives, and both parents could beat their children. Punishment was a force that could only be wielded by someone in a superior social status against someone with an inferior social status.

If a government executed its subjects or the master of a house beat his servants, this was not seen as vicious or hateful. It was one of the ways that people in power could convey that they cared about their charges, and that they were not going to let them become unhealthy. This relationship had its roots in Proverbs 13:24, which states that “he who spares the rod hates his child, but he who loves the child is careful to discipline him.”¹⁶ It was traditional for early modern parents to teach a beaten child that they were only beaten because their parents loved and wanted the best for them, and they relied on scripture for their evidence.¹⁷ Church sermons also encouraged children to submit to authority and to remember that parents always had their best interests at heart.¹⁸ Punishment was a demonstration of the deepest feeling and the most loving compassion; if parents did not beat their child, what might become of him or her in the future? What if the sickness continued, and the child developed into an ill and diseased member of society? Parents – as well as kings and governments, which served a parental role in the lives of their subjects and citizens – had a responsibility to

¹⁵ “Punishment, Discipline, and Power” 4

¹⁶ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*: New Revised Standard Edition. Eds. Coogan, Michael D., Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME PERKINS. (New York: Oxford UP, 2010)

¹⁷ Hamman, Jacob. “The Rod of Discipline: Masochism, Sadism, and the Judeo-Christian Religion.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 39.4 (2000) 324

make sure that their children were healthy and adjusted. This meant proper discipline, and discipline was administered through physical pain. In this context, physical pain was a good and not an evil; it was something to be sought out and actively cultivated, not something to be avoided. It meant that you were loved and cared for, and that your betters were thinking of you and your spiritual health. The church, rhetoricians, political writers, and pedagogical manuals routinely argued that inflicting pain was the only true way to show you cared; the outer flesh might be bruised, but the inner soul would be cleansed. The authors of hagiographies, for example, would often present suffering as “a kind of reward for the victim”,¹⁹ a sign that any moral and spiritual failings were being purged away in a flurry of violent torture. The saints in these narratives might be crippled, ruined and dismembered, but their souls have actually been treated with the greatest warmth and kindness.

The pain of physical discipline, then, was a sort of social glue. It protected the soul, kept the community healthy, and edified anyone who watched it taking place. If early modern writers are to be believed, punishment was the greatest thing that could possibly happen to somebody; the experience of being tortured and beaten was alternately described as being “joyful, beautiful, civilizing, cathartic, curative, and even musical.”²⁰ If this was true, however, was there ever a situation in which pain was not pleasurable? If it is used legitimately, and a person of a higher social standing beats a person of a lower social standing, does the beaten person always need to imagine that he has been cleansed and spiritually enriched? Melissa Sanchez argues

¹⁸ Marshall 20

¹⁹ Enders 180

²⁰ Ibid. 172

that this leads to a very dangerous way of thinking; if the most brutal torture and heightened suffering are not only good but are actively desirable, “it becomes hard to determine when injustice calls for resistance.”²¹ Should people always submit to punishment? Should they ever fight back and question whether or not this punishment is actually good for them? In the eyes of Machiavelli and Luther, two of the most foundational thinkers of the early modern period, these questions miss the point and expose just how ignorant ordinary people are. They both argue that those in power are always acting in the best interest of their subjects and followers, and that everything they do, no matter how cruel it may seem, is for the common good. They claim that ordinary people must believe in their rulers and trust that what seems like cruelty is actually a sort of curative that is being dispensed so that society will remain healthy and prosperous. Machiavelli argues that people should put their trust in princes like Cesare Borgia, while Luther asserts that they must trust in God.

Machiavelli, Luther, and the Necessity of Cruelty

Machiavelli’s Florence was a very dangerous place. Its political arena was highly competitive and marked by extreme paranoia, and public life, even for the average citizen, meant watching one’s words and being careful about making political statements. The wrong words could result in imprisonment, exile (eventually Machiavelli’s own fate) and even death; Nicholas Scott Baker records that “from 1480 to 1560, sixty-two men from the Florentine office-holding class were executed within

²¹ Sanchez, Melissa E. *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature*. (New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 6

the city and its territory for identifiably political reasons.”²² This violence was the result of territorial conflicts and constant power shifts in the Florentine government, and there was a trend of “increasing cruelty”²³ as the city awkwardly groped toward stability. Machiavelli, writing after the Medicis had violently come to power, argues in *The Prince* that cruelty and swift violence are the only ways to achieve a stable government. Cruelty is necessary to quiet down an unruly population, to quell uprisings, and to intimidate political enemies. If people are allowed to get restless, if peasants are allowed to rebel, if political factions are allowed to develop and thrive, a prosperous and successful state of rule could be disrupted. Cruelty is the most efficient path to achieving this end; if it is distasteful, it is nevertheless a necessary evil, and Machiavelli feels that the ends more than justify the means. What is most important for Machiavelli is the outcome of a decision and not the means that were taken to get there; if political stability requires torture and executions, princes need to stifle their softer natures and wield all the cruelty that they need to use.

Cruel princes are, in this sense, much kinder than a ruler who is overly merciful and thus fails to establish order and the rule of law. Machiavelli offers the example of Cesare Borgia, who violently brought the disorderly, fractious Romagna people under his rule. Machiavelli admits that Borgia’s methods were cruel, but reminds his reader that this cruelty “reorganized the Romagna, united it, and established it in peace and loyalty.”²⁴ In Machiavelli’s eyes, Borgia was “much more

²² “For Reasons of State: Political Executions, Republicanism, and the Medici in Florence, 1480-1560.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 62.2 (2009) 447

²³ *Ibid.* 445

²⁴ *The Prince: A Norton Critical Edition*, 2nd Edition. Ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 45

merciful than the people of Florence, who, to avoid the reputation of cruelty, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed.”²⁵ This refers to an incident in which the town of Pistoia separated into two rival factions, the Panciatichi and Cancellieri; the two groups were so violent that, by the end of their struggle, nearly the entire town had been killed. The town was one of Florence’s satellite territories, but the Florentine council preferred not to intervene rather than look like they were intrusively meddling in the affairs of other people.²⁶ Machiavelli feels that this is not only an incredibly weak political maneuver, but that the supposed mercy shown by Florence actually ended up harming the Pistoian people. He asserts that gaining a reputation for cruelty is not necessarily a bad thing, especially if a little cruelty now can save a lot of lives later: “no prince should mind being called cruel for what he does to keep his subjects united and loyal.”²⁷ Cruelty is, in fact, a great mercy; people should actually want their rulers to be as cruel as possible, because this cruelty will keep their community safe, secure and stable. The alternative is for citizens to put their trust in seemingly merciful leaders “who, in their tenderheartedness, allow disorders to occur, with their attendant murders and lootings.”²⁸ Mercy, in the end, does more harm than good, while cruelty does more good than harm; mercy might feel good now, but it will hurt in the end, while cruelty is a momentary pain that will ultimately provide comfort.

This cruelty could not, however, be arbitrary; it had to have a certain logic, and it had to follow particular rules. Machiavelli states that, when Cesare Borgia wanted to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. See editor’s note on the Pistoian conflict.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

“establish peace and reduce the land to obedience”²⁹, he relied on the cruelty and viciousness of an underling named Remirro de Orco. Remirro succeeded in his mission, and in short time a number of unruly regions had been pacified into submission. Borgia realized that “the recent harshness had generated some hatred” in the minds of the people, and wanted to appease them now that such “excessive authority was no longer necessary.”³⁰ He therefore had Remirro murdered, and placed his dismembered body “on the public square of Cesena one morning, in two pieces, with a piece of wood beside him and a bloody knife.”³¹ The morning in question was December 26th, and it was thus a sort of Christmas present, a festival offering by Borgia to the region’s citizens.³² John McCormick calls Remirro’s Christmas execution a kind of “covenant, a promise of faith”,³³ a message from Borgia to his people that cruelty will only ever go so far. When it is no longer needed, it will be torn down and demolished. The irony, of course, is that this message is conveyed through a tortured, mangled body; it seems that when cruelty wants to talk about itself, it can only do so through the language and imagery of cruelty. Cruelty is always helpful, no matter the context; it is used to bring stability to a region, and is then used again to convey that cruelty will no longer be needed. The people are left “at once stunned and satisfied”³⁴ by Remirro’s brutal murder, shocked by its ferocity and appeased in their former bitterness. This act has had a “reparative purpose”,³⁵ healing the community and bringing them together in a state of peaceful rule. What might be lost in this

²⁹ Ibid. 21

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Prophetic Statebuilding: Machiavelli and the Passion of the Duke.” Representations 115.1 (2011) 7

³³ Ibid.

moment is the fact that the earlier acts of cruelty were reparative too; this murder has satisfied the anger of the grumbling villagers, but the cruelty it was meant to repair was itself done for the common good.

Machiavelli's writing is an important background for this project to consider: it is the first sustained consideration of why political cruelty is useful and how people benefit from it. The essential thing is that Machiavelli's model is instrumental; it is presented as a way to think about everyday life.³⁶ If you feel that you have been unjustly imprisoned, if one of your family members is flogged by a police officer, if a neighbor is tortured and executed in the town square, these are good things and things that you want to happen. The next step, if we carry this logic a bit further, is understanding all acts of cruelty as secret mercies. This is the stance that Luther takes. He argues that every moment of cruelty or injustice that occurs in life might actually be a part of God's ultimate plan, and that we can not presume to understand the way that God works or why he makes the choices that he does. If we call God cruel, this means that we know his motivations and can analyze his divine reasoning; Luther finds this notion both impossible and offensive. We must trust and believe that anything cruel or painful that happens to us might be for our own good – not doing so would be sacrilegious and presumptuous. Cruelty, then, could be even more than just a useful political tool; it might be an intrinsic part of God's plan. If we resist or fight back against cruelty, we are claiming to know better than God what is good for us. We need to submit and trust that these things happen for our benefit.

³⁴ Machiavelli 21

³⁵ McCormick 7

Luther asserts that there is no free will and argues that good works cannot free the soul from sin. Luther and Erasmus debate this point in a series of exchanges that end in Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will*. In this treatise, Luther rejects Erasmus' assertion that "there is strength within us"³⁷ that leads to free will. Erasmus claims that, if one is strong enough, free will can be "active in matters pertaining to eternal salvation"³⁸ and that striving long enough and fighting hard enough can win eternal life. Luther agrees that there is a will of some sort, but finds that, due to original sin, it has been "adjudged ungodly, unrighteous, and evil"³⁹ from the very moment of birth. There is nothing a person can do to change this status; a person can work with all his or her strength, but these "works are nothing but sins, evil and ungodly in God's sight."⁴⁰ The only hope for salvation is to submit oneself to the mercy and grace of God. If one does no good works, but has belief in God, that is enough: "righteousness is not reckoned to him that worketh, but is reckoned to him that worketh not, if only he believes."⁴¹ This is not a bad thing, and one should not feel that human life is therefore pointless: it should bring about a sense of relief that salvation is subject to the incomprehensible plans of God and not the chance and randomness of human action. Luther admits that "even if it could be, I should not want 'free-will' to be given me, nor anything to be left in my own hands to endeavor after salvation."⁴² God is merciful because one does not need to perform works to be saved: all that is needed is

³⁶ Grady, Hugh. "Shakespeare's Links to Machiavelli and Montaigne: Constructing Intellectual Modernity in Early Modern Europe." *Comparative Literature* 52.2 (2000) 123

³⁷ *The Bondage of the Will*, Eds. and Trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (Michigan: James Clarke & Co., 1957) 75

³⁸ Ibid. 76

³⁹ Ibid. 296

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

accepting one's "utter unworthiness"⁴³ and falling before God in total humility. God shows, in this sense, the most powerful display of mercy: he saves the sinful simply because of their belief and their willingness to submit themselves.

God's mercy, so contradictory and mysterious, cannot quite be understood. There might be times when life can seem less than merciful, or perhaps even cruel. If life appears unjust – if bad people gain success and riches, while the good are miserable and oppressed – one needs to have faith that God's mercy is behind it all. People of true faith must remember their submission and not presume to question God's judgment. God must never be blamed, because his plans are beyond our ken to understand, much less criticize. Luther asserts that, if God's "justice were such as could be adjudged just by human reckoning, it clearly would not be divine; it would in no way differ from human justice."⁴⁴ It does differ, of course, and this sort of justice is of a much higher order than anything that humans can produce. God may not necessarily be the person who does the punishing, but this punishment is a part of his larger plan. If one questions this judgment, if one calls life cruel or complains about injustice, it demonstrates a great lack of faith. Luther rails against this, condemning anyone who presumes to think that God is cruel or unjust: "To think that we cannot for a little while *believe* that He is just, when He has actually promised us that when He reveals His glory we shall all clearly *see* that He both was and is just!"⁴⁵ In due time, at the end of days, the clouds will part and the light of revelation will "reveal God, to whom alone belongs a judgment whose justice is incomprehensible, as a God Whose

⁴² Ibid. 313

⁴³ Ibid. 314

⁴⁴ Ibid. 314-5

justice is most righteous and evident – provided only that in the meanwhile we *believe* it, as we are instructed and encouraged to do.”⁴⁶ Cruelty, pain, injustice, suffering, and other hardships might actually be instances of God’s incomprehensible mercy. We can’t ever understand for sure – or, at least, we won’t be able to until the end of the world – and so we have no right to call anything that happens to us cruel. The cruelty we feel might be, when God’s plan is fully revealed, the moment that made our life meaningful.

We need to believe that cruelty is good for us, even if we do not understand the process by which cruelty is converted into mercy. Luther argues that this belief must be placed in God, while Machiavelli claims that the secular prince is that figure that should be relied on to provide a healthy, merciful cruelty. However, despite this difference, both of these thinkers share the view that people do not know what is good for them, and that they should start to recognize the cruelty inflicted on them as something beneficial. This is an important development when compared to the classical thought that preceded it; Seneca and Jerome were only interested in the way that cruelty was used by rulers,⁴⁷ but Luther and Machiavelli are equally concerned with the way it is received by the people it is used against. How are ordinary people affected by cruelty? How do they feel about it, and how should they feel about it? What use might cruelty have in a person’s life, and how could a certain relationship to cruelty define an individual’s worldview? Luther and Machiavelli might seem sadistic at times, but I argue that they are not writing about sadism. They do not claim that the

⁴⁵ Ibid. 315 (*italics in original*)

⁴⁶ Ibid. 317 (*italics in original*)

⁴⁷ Baraz 15

prince or God enjoy the experience of being cruel, and they do not claim that they themselves enjoy the idea of cruelty. What they describe is, instead, a kind of proto-masochism that analyses the benefits of cruelty and hardship. This analysis is, however, entirely social and political; neither thinker considers the idea that someone could take actual pleasure in the torture and punishment that they receive. Cruelty is good for the soul, it is a useful spiritual exercise, it is essential for social harmony, but it is not exactly something to luxuriate in and enjoy. People should want cruelty to happen to them; this is a sign that rulers are working tirelessly in order to ensure political stability and public safety. Punishment, torture, discipline, and imprisonment are serious matters – they are not a hobby, they are not exciting or sexy, and they are not meant to be enjoyed. Cruelty, torture and corporeal punishment are, in their eyes, solemn necessities: they are valuable and important, but they are not titillating or fun.

How could cruelty be fun, then? How could it become the foundation of a new kind of desire and the root of a new kind of sexual practice? How could Luther and Machiavelli's logic of cruelty and submission actually be pleasurable? Luther and Machiavelli are transition figures in the development of masochism: they help to provide the logic of masochism, but they do not offer any of the pleasure that is so essential to masochistic desire. Masochism is not simply about obedience, submission, or recognizing that obedience and submission are good for you and society. It is about experiencing the most intense pleasure when you being submissive and obedient, about enjoying the fact that you have scripted this experience for yourself, and about appreciating and luxuriating in the shame and guilt that accompanies that experience. Luther and Machiavelli do not account for the fact that their logic can feel good, and

this is the key development that I will turn to in the next section of this introduction. Where did this pleasure come from, and how was it articulated in early modern culture? Where did it grow, what did it consist of, and who had access to it? How was it recognized in society, and how were people taught to relate to it? I claim that there was a particularly early modern quality to this pleasure, and that it was specifically connected to two early modern innovations.

The first of these innovations is the nascent capitalist market, and the second is the popularization of the theater as a major art form and an increasingly vital cultural touchstone. The rise of the market allowed people to start to think of themselves as pieces of property: the idea of the self became something that could be bought and sold, and personal identity began to carry an economic value. If a person became embroiled in debt, this debt was an intrinsic part of their experience of the world, and defined how they felt about themselves and how other people treated and regarded them. Debtors were ridiculed and humiliated, were seen as a leech on the community, and were dragged into court and forced to defend their interests. The important thing to note about these hardships and impositions is that people were personally responsible for them. They were not imposed from above; ordinary people regularly signed themselves into economic, legal and marital situations that resulted in pain, shame and imprisonment, connecting them to these conditions in a very personal way. Early modern dramas were obsessed with this idea, and constantly depicted characters that understood themselves as deeply bound to the logic of the market. These characters tend to find pleasure in the constraints and hardships of the contracts they have made, and there is a sense that they make bad contracts specifically so that can

feel this pleasure. The condition of being in debt, of being humiliated and abused, is a source of pleasure and, in some cases, the foundation of an erotic fantasy. This trend is especially noticeable in city comedies, due to their frequent staging of the market, fascination with contracts and debt, and the many little cruelties that are so crucial to their comic effect.

In the next sections of this introduction, I will do three things. First of all, I will discuss the rise of the early modern market, its impact on early modern identity, and the way that it interacted with the early modern theater. I will then pause my historical discussion to discuss how we think about masochistic pleasure today; I will provide an overview of contemporary writing about masochism, drawing on diverse material from psychoanalysis, feminist theory, queer studies, sex activism, and related disciplines. It is important that I refer to a wide variety of thinkers, and that I do not put the idea of masochism or masochistic desire into a simple box where it can be easily explained away. I will offer a range of views, exploring different opinions about the significance of masochism, the effect that it has on people, its role in society, and so on. This will be an essential background for the rest of the project, and I will often refer to the thinkers and theories that I outline here. I will finally, in the third and last section, return to early modern England, and will discuss how the early modern theater, informed by the market, began to illustrate and dramatize the kind of masochistic pleasures that we normally think of as such a modern concept. This does not mean that I will make an anachronistic argument about early modernity's relationship to masochism; I do not want to assert that early modernity "created" the discourse of masochism as we think of it today, or that psychoanalysts and queer

theorists are rehearsing ideas that were already spelled out hundreds of years earlier. I want to suggest, instead, that these two areas of thought are continuum points on the historical development of masochism, and that we can understand each one better by discussing them at the same time. This discussion of masochistic pleasure and the early modern theater will conclude with a description of the four chapters that make up the body of my dissertation; I will review the texts that I will be working with and will explain the approach that I will take to these texts.

The Market and the Theater

The development of the capitalist market marked a huge transformation in the way that people lived and spoke to one another; Martha Howell determines that the language of the economy, including the “language of business and social theory, the language of the accountant, the language of the measurer or surveyor”,⁴⁸ and the language of buying and selling, quickly became the essential vocabularies for interacting with society and communicating with other people. Jonathan Gil Harris claims that there was also a transformation on a more national scale, as England came to be “defined in terms of its wealth within a global framework”⁴⁹ and not as an isolated island. The growth of the market was not simply an economic shift: it involved a shift in the “existing habits and factors of thought”⁵⁰ that characterized daily life. One of the reasons for the enormity of this shift was the fact that property

⁴⁸ “The Language of Property” 17

⁴⁹ *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare’s England*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 8

⁵⁰ DuPlessis, Robert S. “Capital Formations.” *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*. Ed. Henry S. Turner. (New York: Routledge, 2002) 29

became movable instead of immovable, easily sold and traded.⁵¹ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, writing about the history of capitalism, argues that this led to everything in the environment becomes a good that could be bought or sold.⁵² If it is yours, it could be bought or sold for the going market rate. This meant that ownership was no longer a question of heritage, lineage or right, but of a fluctuating value that had to be calculated and monitored. If you own something, you no longer own it in perpetuity; property and goods could be sold, traded, exchanged and repossessed, and “rightful” ownership of a piece of property could change hands many times in a relatively short amount of time. The economy went from being extremely static to extremely fluid, constantly changing and evolving, and this condition of incessant change had a major impact on the social and cultural landscape of the period. It was, on the one hand, a powerful leveler, as it allowed for a new social mobility, but on the other hand it led to widespread disenfranchisement and alienation, people losing their goods and property, and a record number of people living in poverty.

In this atmosphere, even personal identity could become a commodity to be traded and bartered with. In the wake of “repressive Tudor and Stuart legislation directed against the dispossessed classes”⁵³ that included sumptuary laws and drastic punishments for theft and trespassing, ordinary people were asked to think of themselves in terms of worth and value. I am worth this much because I have this much property and this much money, because I wear these clothes, because I do or do

⁵¹ Howell 21

⁵² Bagchi, Amiya Kumar. “Money under Capitalism: Domestic, Universal.” *Social Scientist* 37.7/8 (2009) 5

⁵³ Halpern, Richard. *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991) 63

not do this kind of job, and so on. Karmen MacKendrick argues that ordinary people began to be “identified by and as consumer objects”⁵⁴ and were imagined to be as much a part of the market as the things that they bought and sold. You owned something but could also own someone, and could be owned in your own right. You could be “owned” if you signed yourself into a contract that you could not get yourself out of, or if you got yourself into such a deep debt that you could not pay it back. This was less about literal ownership, as in actual slavery, and more about the rhetorical idea that a person was worth a certain amount and could be therefore bought and sold for a certain value. If someone was poor, this meant that he or she was a slave at heart, and that being owned was a part of his or her natural condition. If you had no money or property, this meant that you were cowardly, impotent, and morally bankrupt, and that your poverty was a natural extension of the internal poverty that governed your inner life. This sort of rhetoric had already existed in terms of class and the way that the aristocracy spoke about peasants and commoners, but it was now specifically grounded in the language of the market and the way that the market understood how much something – or someone – was worth.

The culture of the period was equally invested in notions of worth and value. Douglas Bruster’s work has been instrumental in informing my understanding of this economic dynamic and how it affected the early modern culture. He states, for instance, that the act of writing and performing plays shifted from being the product of itinerant companies to being the profitable and highly popular enterprise of a series of stable theaters located right in the capital. Theater companies did not have to roam

⁵⁴ *Counterpleasures*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999) 110

from village to village, putting on different shows, and theaters instead became “regular fixtures in the urban geography of Renaissance London.”⁵⁵ The process of putting on a play turned into a solid business decision, as the audience was now much larger and tended to have access to a greater amount of spare time and money for leisure activities. Plays had to sell themselves to these urban audiences, and the content of these plays had to cast a wide net to entice as many audience members as possible: the poor, the wealthy, men, women, children, business owners, lawyers, fishmongers, laborers, and so on. Bruster argues that theaters had to appeal to so many people, in fact, that they were “frequently characterized, by detractors and supporters alike, as markets in miniature.”⁵⁶ There was a pressing demand for an increasing amount of variety, and the number of genres that were staged – historical dramas, revenge tragedies, romances, tragicomedies – speak to an incessant search to find what would catch with audiences and what would prove popular. Plays were “described in terms of their exchange value”⁵⁷ and how likely they were to make back their money. These plays were performed with an eye to being as profitable as possible, and theaters were very much places of business. In this way, theaters were “both responsive and responsible to the desires of their playgoing publics”⁵⁸ and catered to the varied expectations of many different kinds of people. It was possible to go to a theater and, like a shopper at a market, choose the particular drama that most interested you.

⁵⁵ Bruster, Douglas. *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 1

⁵⁶ Ibid. 7

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 10

The content of these plays was, therefore, wrapped up in the demands of the market, and they constantly staged scenes of what might be called the dramatic material of nascent capitalism: contract disputes, market haggling, trade negotiations, money problems, falling into debt, etc. These scenes occur in dramas as disparate as revenge tragedies (Iago instructing Roderigo to put money in his purse in *Othello*) and screwball comedies (Sir Petronel Flash conning his new wife out of her property in *Eastward Hoe*), reflecting a persistent interest in the little episodes that define life in a setting that has undergone such a dramatic economic shift. These scenes were not necessarily set in banks, credit offices, or actual marketplaces, but were spread throughout the urban landscape: early modern plays demonstrated that bars, hotels, churches and brothels were as implicated in the logic and language of the market as the market itself; this leads Bruster to suggest that the “market was as much a concept as a place.”⁵⁹ The theater, often referred to as a kind of market in its own right, produced plays with a unique awareness that market activities could take occur in all sorts of places, and many of these plays brought economic logic and language into unexpected areas like the prison, the pillory, the torture chamber, and the bedroom. The drama of the period insisted that the market was still relevant in even the most extreme moments of sex and violence, and tended to punctuate the most graphic or brutal scenes with metaphors and images that evoked debt, trade, property, and value. The market was still present when people were experiencing the greatest pain or the most heightened pleasure; this was, at least, what these plays consistently wanted to argue.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 15

If a scene of violence or humiliation used economic metaphors, that violence and humiliation tended to be coded as comic or erotic. These plays are filled with characters taking pleasure in suffering, and this is particularly true when that suffering involves any invocation of the market. Melissa Sanchez finds that images of pleasurable pain “repeatedly supplant those of courtship and marriage”⁶⁰ in the work of early modern playwrights, and this was especially the case when these images were paired with the language of the market. MacKendrick insightfully argues that the period’s drama continually suggests that “pleasure is governed by a capitalist economic of trade and gain”⁶¹ so that even what seems painful, hurtful or undesirable can feel good when it is delivered in an economic package. How did an invocation of the market make something that should be painful into something pleasurable? There are several reasons why playwrights may have been so interested in this relationship between pain, pleasure and the workings of the market. It was, first of all, in the interest of theaters to convince audiences that paying for a negative experience could have a positive outcome. The theater was, after all, a dangerous place, where pickpockets, pimps, con artists, and other criminals roamed in search of distracted onlookers and simple-minded marks. It was also possible to catch the plague, and theaters were often shut down due to plague outbreaks; the amount of people that crowded into these theaters was a recipe for spreading disease.⁶² If paying to go to the theater was a dangerous enterprise, the theater was interested in conveying the idea that engaging in risky economic transactions – including those transactions that, like

⁶⁰ *Erotic Subjects* 4

⁶¹ *Counterpleasures* 3

⁶² Bruster 25

attending a play, could possibly lead to theft or bodily harm – might be great fun even if you do wind up getting conned or injured. In fact, getting conned or injured might be very unique sources of pleasure, and worth experiencing. The period's plays suggest that being duped, conned, cheated and humiliated are integral parts of urban life, and that everyone will have a negative encounter with the market at one point or another; if the theater could potentially be one of those negative encounters, it was better to think of economic negativity as amusing and urbanely pleasurable.

These plays teach their audiences that the cramped, pestilent, and dangerous conditions of modern life can be thought of as amusing and outright pleasurable. If people are exploited and taken advantage of, if they are robbed of their money and given no avenue to regain it, if they are trapped in a certain economic condition and find it difficult to break from of it, this is funny and part of the comedy of living in an urban setting. This dynamic is highlighted in an early scene from Beaumont and Fletcher's tragicomedy *A King and No King*; it turns the oppressions and humiliations of economic upheaval and class stratification into comic material. In this scene, Arbaces, King of Iberia, has returned home after a long war campaign and greets his people in the street. The people crowd around him, interested to hear him speak and wondering what he has to say:

Arbac.: All the account that I can render you
For all the love you have bestowed on me,
All your expenses to maintain my war,
Is but a little word. You will imagine
'Tis slender payment, yet 'tis such a word
As is not to be bought without our bloods:
'Tis peace.⁶³

⁶³ Ed. Robert K. Turner, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963) 2.2.80-6

Arbaces boasts that “peace” has been achieved and that all the economic hardship that his people have undergone has been worth the sacrifice. When he has made his spiel and left, a group of local women discuss his speech. They seem to be a little confused, however, about exactly what Arbaces has brought them back in exchange for their tax dollars:

1 Wife: Did not his majesty say he had brought us home
peas for all our money?

2 Wife: Yes, marry, did he.

1 Wife: They are the first I heard on this year, by my troth.
I long’d for some of ‘em; did he not say we should have some?

2 Wife: Yes, and so we shall anon, I warrant you, have every
one a peck brought home to our houses.⁶⁴

Arbaces has brought nothing of substance to his people in return for their contributions, but has conquered his enemies and calls this “peace.” The women mishear him, and ruminate on the “peas” he is going to send them and their neighbors. The misunderstanding these women demonstrate is a fun little joke about language and homophones, but it is also a record of their distance from the people who manage and make use of their money. It depicts the fundamental separation between people who have to give up their wealth and people who exploit the wealth that is given up. There might be actual people in need of peas or food in general, but all the king has to offer is rhetoric and his own satisfaction with having used public funds as he has seen fit. This scene is also a record of the disparity between the heroic Arbaces, a war-minded politician, and the gossiping housewives who are unable to understand his speech; men make the decisions that guide the development of a nation, and women

can only comment on what kind of produce they have to choose from. The comic qualities of the scene sugarcoat the misogyny and economic alienation that it documents; it suggests that exploitation is a theatrical amusement and something charming and harmless. These women fail to interpret the language by which they are being sold political bluster in place of the material resources that they hoped to gain, and this is a joke that the audience is expected to be entertained by and even recognize from their own experience of urban life.

The insistence with which plays depicted the economic problems of modern life as pleasurable and comic was matched by the popularity of those plays, a dynamic that could itself be seen in economic terms of supply and demand. The audiences of early modern England were willing to continually patronize plays in which economic peril was used as a comic device or given an erotic charge. This may seem counterintuitive, but Karmen MacKendrick has given a name to these counterintuitive experiences: she calls them counterpleasures, and argues that these pleasures lead a person to feel good after an event or moment that should specifically not make him feel good.⁶⁵ The idea of a counterpleasure is a perfect model for understanding the masochistic logic that I discuss throughout this project. MacKendrick's term is particularly relevant because she states that counterpleasures are ultimately resistant to being given an exchange value. She claims that counterpleasures defy traditional narratives such as goals, or fulfilling any kind of objective.⁶⁶ The point is not to get somewhere, but to luxuriate in a constant sensation of tension and expectation. These

⁶⁴ 2.2.148-55

⁶⁵ MacKendrick 11

⁶⁶ Ibid.

pleasures are opposed, in other words, to normative institutions and social rules. It may seem ironic, then, that I want to argue that early modern dramas depict masochism through the language of the market; the market is an incredibly normative institution, and it is an institution that is specifically about achieving a very concrete profit. However, at the same time, this makes complete sense. This is because MacKendrick goes on to argue that counterpleasures can use the models that oppose them – capitalism, religion, governments, heteronormativity – to inform, alter, and enhance their transgressive power.⁶⁷ MacKendrick asserts that counterpleasures gain their greatest effect when they are paired with the very discourses that would otherwise obstruct them or prevent them from being expressed. This is what gives the masochistic desire in these early modern dramas such an impact: this desire is paired with an economic language that would otherwise prevent its expression. Masochism gains its power by embracing the very language and logic that should oppose it. MacKendrick's insight into what defines a counterpleasure will vitally influence my readings of early modern drama and how these dramas pair masochistic desire and the emerging market.

In the next sections, I will go deeper into my review and analysis of masochistic pleasure. I will first discuss how thinkers and writers began to understand and critically discuss masochism in the twentieth century, and I will highlight how masochism has developed as a discourse and practice. This discussion will involve a number of different perspectives, and I will present two sides of a debate about masochism: one side claims that it is a transgressive force that subverts normative

⁶⁷ Ibid. 14

expectations about sex and gender, while the other side claims that it actually contributes to (or, in some cases, is circumscribed by) the very political powers that it wants to destabilize and counteract, making it just as problematic and oppressive as any traditional discourse. I will finally end the chapter by closely reading why the early modern theater was such an ideal place for masochistic desire to develop and flourish.

Freud and Deleuze on Masochism

Otto Kemberg provides the following definition of masochism: it is a form of sexual desire “in which some kind of pleasure is tied to the suffering or humiliation undergone by the subject.”⁶⁸ This definition of masochism has undergone a series of transformations over the past four hundred years, and has been shaped by a number of cultural and social shifts.⁶⁹ English medical textbooks in the seventeenth century, for instance, “referenced flagellation as a means to shorten the male refractory period and as a remedy for erectile dysfunction and female lack of desire.”⁷⁰ It was a medical solution to a medical problem, but a few centuries later it would become a medical problem in its own right. The term has also changed in the way that people have incorporated it into their personal identities and thought of themselves as part of a group of other people who shared the same desires. Masochism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a practice that took place in brothels or in private bedrooms, but by the early twentieth century it had become a central theme of sex clubs, social

⁶⁸ “Clinical Dimensions of Masochism.” *One Hundred Years of Masochism: Literary Texts, Social and Cultural Contexts*. Eds. Finke, Michael C. and Carl Niekerk (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) 24

⁶⁹ Sisson, Kathy. “The Cultural Formation of S/M: History and Analysis.” *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadoomasochism*. Eds. Langdrige, Darren and Meg Barker (New York: Palgrave, 2007) 11

networks and entire communities of like-minded individuals.⁷¹ The concept of masochism experienced its most seismic changes around this time, as Freud defined it as a psychoanalytic term and proposed an almost medical rationale behind why masochists invite and take pleasure in pain. I will begin this section by discussing Freud's early writings on masochism, and will then move on to the way that Deleuze extends, complicates and alters Freud's claims. I will then outline some of the major issues in contemporary conversations about masochism, highlighting such topics as consent, accusations of misogyny, and the debates about whether masochism is an act that speaks out against power or an act that actually reinscribes power at its deepest levels.

Freud is the first major thinker to offer a comprehensive view of what masochism is and how it works. He begins by claiming that it is inextricably linked to sadism; he claims that masochism is, in fact, sadism turned against the self.⁷² This transformation occurs at the end of a process in which the death instinct and the libido battle for control of the mind. Freud states that the death instinct tries to turn a person's inherent instability, so changeable and constantly in flux, into the "inorganic stability" of death; the libido, on the other hand, attempts to render this death instinct into something productive and harmless.⁷³ The libido does this by turning the death instinct back out against the world, and this is what leads to sadism: the need for destruction of the self has been converted into the need for destruction of others,

⁷⁰ Ibid. 13

⁷¹ Ibid. 15

⁷² Bromley, James M. "Social Relations and Masochistic Sexual Practice in *The Nice Valour*." Modern Philology 107.4 (2010) 563

preserving the self and turning destruction into a form of sexual desire.⁷⁴ However, it is possible that, when the death instinct has been directed outwards and becomes the central way that a person articulates his or her sexual desire, this instinct can be “turned inward again”⁷⁵ and redirected against the self. In other words, masochism begins with a sadistic subject who makes himself the object of that sadism.⁷⁶ The masochist receives pleasure by doing to himself what he would have done to others: masochistic fantasies involve “being pinioned, bound, beaten painfully, whipped, in some way mishandled, forced to obey unconditionally, defiled, degraded.”⁷⁷ Freud argues that, while “physical pain and feelings of distress” are traditionally intended to be “signals of danger” and signs that someone should flee from a painful situation, for a masochist these signals are “ends in themselves”⁷⁸ and not anything to be avoided.

Freud states that a masochist will often imagine himself as having “committed some crime...which is to be expiated by his undergoing pain and torture.”⁷⁹ In this scenario, the masochist relishes the idea that he will be punished for this (often simply imagined) crime; he wants to be treated like a criminal, and to have the harshest and cruelest sentence brought down on his head. He must, therefore, recruit someone who will punish him and make him suffer. The masochist casts himself as an object, and someone else has to be the subject that will injure and humiliate this object.⁸⁰ The

⁷³ “The Economic Problem in Masochism.” General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology. Trans. Philip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 1963) 194

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 195

⁷⁶ “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes.” General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology. Trans. Philip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 1963) 92

⁷⁷ “The Economic Problem” 193

⁷⁸ Ibid. 190

⁷⁹ Ibid. 193

⁸⁰ “Instincts” 92

subject has all the rights and is a real person, while the object has no rights and can be treated as less than the lowest form of life. The masochist is compelled to think of himself as a criminal because of a “sense of guilt that is for the most part unconscious”⁸¹ and that drives him to try and make amends for the imaginary wrong that he has done. It is only through suffering that he can make these amends, and this suffering gives him great pleasure. If a masochist’s guilt is sufficiently intense, it does not really matter who punishes him; Freud states that “whether the sentence is cast by a loved or by an indifferent person is of no importance; it may even be caused by impersonal forces or circumstances.”⁸² Freud calls this latter form of masochism, in which the impersonal cruelties and embarrassments of everyday life inspire a sense of pleasure, a “moral masochism” that does not require pain or any type of physical contact.⁸³ Freud also stresses, however, that no form of masochism places that much importance on pain; pain is only a means to an end, and it is “not the pain itself which is enjoyed, but the accompanying sexual excitement”⁸⁴ that comes from expiating the imagined sense of guilt in the most shameful and humiliating way possible. In this sense, masochism is similar to the infantile fore-pleasures that Freud discusses in his essay “The Transformations of Puberty”: like masochism, these fore-pleasures are grounded in tension and expectation more than in traditional fulfillment.⁸⁵ The masochist and infant are both content to remain in a state of suspension, never reaching the moment of normative orgasm. Humiliation and shame are enough for the

⁸¹ “The Economic Problem” 192

⁸² Ibid. 196

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Instincts” 93

masochist; the more shameful and the more humiliating the better, because this will make the pleasure that the masochist feels all the more intense and pronounced.

Freud asserts that masochism must always originate in sadism: he argues that “a more direct masochistic satisfaction is highly doubtful”⁸⁶ and does not believe that this masochistic logic can exist without a sadistic definition.”⁸⁷ The transfer between sadism and masochism was the “economic problem” that Freud references in the title of one of his papers on masochism; he was never quite able to explain whether or not sadism entirely transforms into masochism, or if there is still a trace of sadism left behind in masochism. He finds that there is something left behind or something lost in the transfer from sadism to masochism, much like what happens when you use money to pay for something. The equivalence between what you buy and how much you pay for it is never exact, and there is always something lost or confused in this transaction, a remainder that cannot quite be accounted for. In this sense, the economy is more than just a convenient metaphor for talking about masochistic desire; Freud finds that there is something deeply economic about masochism itself, and that understanding masochism requires an understanding of value and exchange. I argue Freud is identifying something about the masochistic experience that was first explored by the early modern theater. Freud and the theater are both interested in the economic process of masochism, especially in the way that masochists value or do not value themselves, and how this sense of value plays into a masochist’s personal identity. Freud is attuned to the early modern fascination with how a masochist understands value and how

⁸⁵ *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, The Freud Reader. Trans. Peter Gay. (New York: Norton, 1989) 131

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 92

economic logic plays a factor in masochistic desire. Gilles Deleuze would later take up Freud's economic interest, but would take this interest in more specific and rigorous direction. I find Deleuze's masochistic model to be more compelling than Freud's, but Deleuze is not as explicit about Freud about the idea that he is discussing an economic process. I will talk more about my critical stance on these two thinkers once I have discussed Deleuze's own approach to masochism.

Gilles Deleuze counters and complicates many of Freud's claims. He states, first of all, that masochism is not created out of any original sadism. Deleuze argues that while the sadist may enjoy being hurt, and the masochist may enjoy giving pain, they cannot be collapsed into each other; the pleasure the sadist receives from pain is different from the pleasure the masochist receives, and the pleasure the masochist receives from giving pain is different from the pleasure the sadist receives.⁸⁸ Deleuze claims that the "sadist and the masochist might well be enacting separate dramas, each complete in itself, with different sets of characters and no possibility of communication between them."⁸⁹ Deleuze submits that the two forms of desire are too distant from one another to be related in any way. He claims that masochism operates through an entirely unique set of narratives and obsessions, and that these elements do not rely on any original sadism. While sadism is the expression of an intensely destructive sensuality, in masochism there is a notable "desexualization of libidinal aggression"⁹⁰ that is completely counter to the entire idea of sadism. The coldness or

⁸⁷ Ibid. 45

⁸⁸ *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, 6th Edition. (Cambridge, MA: Zone, 1991) 46

⁸⁹ Ibid. 45

⁹⁰ Ibid. 104

lack of emotion that a masochist shows is, in fact, a “disavowal of sensuality”⁹¹ and anything that might look or seem like traditional sexual pleasure.

This does not mean, however, that there is nothing Freudian about Deleuze’s analysis of masochism. He offers an economic theory of his own, but he uses the language and logic of contracts instead Freud’s language and logic of value. Deleuze asserts that, in masochistic practice, the masochist and the torturer sign a contract in order to ensure that both parties agree to exactly what will take place and how the session will be conducted; this contract stipulates that at “a precise point in time and for a determinate period”⁹² the torturer will have the right to abuse, ridicule, punish, and control the masochist. The torturer’s actions, what he or she will wear, what he or she will say and do, must be “stated, promised, announced and carefully described”⁹³ in advance, and the session must not deviate from these established parameters. The masochist is oppressed and constrained by the terms of a contract that he has signed and, in most cases, written himself. These contracts use legalistic language and are extremely formal; this is necessary because these scenes entail an incredible amount of detail, and everything must be precisely in place in order for the scene to achieve its desired effect. If the contract is not adhered to, if the torturer says the wrong thing or uses the wrong tools or props, this is akin to breaking a law. The contract cannot be ignored or taken lightly; on the contrary, it should be followed to the letter in the most pedantic way, and it should be enforced with a merciless strictness that grows

⁹¹ Ibid. 52

⁹² Deleuze 65-6

⁹³ Ibid. 18

“increasingly cruel and restrictive”⁹⁴ as the session wears on. The masochist insists that the law of the contract is applied to him as rigidly as possible, and that he is given no quarter. There should be no emotional or sentimental interpretation of the contract’s words, and they should be followed without feeling sorry for the masochist who is being punished.

Deleuze’s theory of the masochistic contract is incredibly compelling, and I have found it an insightful model for thinking about masochistic desire throughout this project. He does not, however, explicitly use the term “economic” or consider his theory in an economic light. I have called his analysis of masochistic contracts an economic model, but that term is the result of my own reading of his writing. Deleuze provides many sharp critiques of Freud’s work, but he does not specifically carry forward one of the lasting insights of Freud’s writings on masochism: the specifically economic quality of masochistic desire. In other words, Deleuze misses an essential link between the work that he has done and the Freudian work that he is critiquing and responding to. I find that while Deleuze’s model of masochism is more considered and intellectually rigorous, Freud’s explicitly economic language is a key background for how I think about masochism and how I will approach the various early modern texts that I read in the following chapters. Deleuze does not recognize, like Freud does, that there might be an “economic problem” at the core of masochistic desire; the contracts that he describes are extremely neat and tidy, and there is not the sort of loss or unaccounted remainder that Freud identifies in the masochistic understanding of value. I will follow Freud in arguing that masochistic exchanges are not always perfect and

⁹⁴ Ibid. 76

exact, and that we must pay attention to the economic dynamics of masochistic logic. I want to notice, like Freud does, what is lost when someone expresses masochistic desire, and what they get in return. I will, therefore, work to bring more economic terms into Deleuze's model of masochism, and I will repeatedly show how versions of Deleuze's model are articulated on the early modern stage through dramatic scenes that feature buying, selling, contracts, and incurring and paying off debt.

The next two sections will conclude my introduction. The first section reviews the critical understanding and reception of masochism during the twentieth century, while the second section will return us to an early modern context and focus more deeply on the theater's relationship to masochism. I am especially interested in how the audience factors into this masochistic dynamic, and what sort of masochistic pleasure can be found in being a spectator. What is the difference between masochistic authorship and masochistic spectatorship? How does an audience receive masochistic pleasure by watching an erotic scene play out? This will be an essential question for my entire project, and I will especially pursue this thread in my fourth chapter. I feel that, before I begin to engage this key question, it will be important for me to pause and consider how we think about masochism today.

The Critical Reception of Masochism

There are two schools of thought about masochism: one states that masochism reinscribes lines of power and reinforces oppression, while the other claims that this practice radically destabilizes where power lies and how it can be used.⁹⁵ Those that argue masochism is a transgressive act assert that it calls into question whether being

⁹⁵ Bromley 560

dominant is the only form of personal agency.⁹⁶ These thinkers and practitioners claim that masochism poses “a radical challenge to the foundations of the political and cosmic order”⁹⁷ and that it offers a very different narrative of power and submission. Deleuze claims that the masochist’s “apparent obedience conceals a criticism”⁹⁸ of the way that governments expect their citizens to follow along and submit to their decisions without any questions. Deleuze argues that the attention to detail that masochists show, the specificity with which they adhere to the precise wording of their contracts, the intensity with which they mold the very particular *mise en scene* of an erotic moment, “is a demonstration of the law’s absurdity.”⁹⁹ In these masochistic behaviors, the legalistic rigor of the language of power is revealed to be pedantic, impractical, and ultimately ridiculous. If a masochist experiences pleasure when he or she is abused by a torturer who speaks with the anonymous severity of the law, the masochist is provoking “the very disorder” that this anonymous severity “is intended to prevent.”¹⁰⁰ The government, the courts, the police, and related institutions do not intend for people to feel good when they are punished and disciplined; punishment and discipline are supposed to be deterrents, not incitements, to committing improprieties and crimes. The thing that makes masochism so transgressive, then, is that masochists invite this punishment and discipline on their heads, suggesting that they can do whatever they want with the language of power. These masochists, in doing so, make

⁹⁶ Ibid. 558

⁹⁷ Cosgrove, Peter. “Edmund Burke, Gilles Deleuze, and the Subversive Image of Masochism.” *ELH* 66.2 (1999) 408

408

⁹⁸ Deleuze 88

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

what Peter Cosgrove calls a “fantastic mockery”¹⁰¹ out of what is a solemn and serious assertion of domination and control.

Masochism is also transgressive because it suggests that sexual pleasure is not necessarily located in the genitals.¹⁰² It is instead spread throughout the skin and diffused throughout the body, so that pleasure can be felt in many places on the body that are not traditionally considered erotic.¹⁰³ In the masochistic experience, the body does not necessarily need to end at the skin or the extremities. It is thrown all around the room, so that the masochist feels his body even in the props and other elements of the *mise en scene* that comprise his erotic scenario. This is a very different conception of how sex is supposed to work; it is distributed instead of focused, multiple instead of singular, and interested in tension instead of reaching a goal. This desire subverts conventional social expectations and asserts that sex does not have to be about completion or satisfaction. It also does not have to be about reproduction or customary gender roles, and it offers an alternative eroticism that is more personal and intense than normative desire. This, according to writers like Deleuze, Bersani and Zizek, makes masochism into a political act; participating in masochism is a statement against social norms and a critique of the burdens that are placed on people to behave like good citizens and produce children. It is also a critique of the logic of capitalism, and the incessant need for capitalist enterprises to have some kind of an objective or a point at which an endeavor is deemed successful. Masochism uses the capitalist tools of contracts, debt, and ownership in a way that is very different from their intended

¹⁰¹ Cosgrove 412

¹⁰² Bromley 561

¹⁰³ Ibid.

purpose; there is no attempt to recover lost revenue or make good on loans and there is no interest in producing anything that can be used. The point is to linger in the language of the contract and relish the idea of debt, participating in these systems for their own sake and not in the hopes of acquiring or purchasing something.

The flipside to viewing masochism as transgressive and subversive is paying attention to the group of thinkers who consider it to be damaging and oppressive. Darren Langdridge and Meg Barker, for instance, criticize psychoanalysis for failing to draw “any clear distinction between acts which are transgressive and those which are coercive.”¹⁰⁴ If someone enjoys the experience of being abused and demeaned, have they only been taught to feel this way by institutions of power? Is masochism really a commentary on power, or does it simply rehearse and problematically replicate the language of power? These questions suggest that masochism is an expression of a sort of false consciousness instituted by living in a state of political and social repression. These critics claim that masochists only believe that they are feeling pleasure because this is exactly the sort of logic that would emerge from a society that is so permeated by the abuses of power. It difficult, then, to determine whether or not masochists actually consent to the abuse and humiliation that they undergo; if a masochist signs himself into a contract and completely believes that this is what he wants to do, the agency that he is expressing may be entirely coerced and not truly his own. If this is true, masochists are only doing what the institutions of power want them to do, and they are not actually critiquing anything. Masochism, in this case, is not subversive at all; it actually helps support the discourses that it claims

to critique, and reinforces the power that those discourses have over the people who suffer under them.

Masochism is also critiqued for being a misogynist practice. Freud, Deleuze and other theorists refer to the masochist almost exclusively as “he” and to the torturer almost exclusively as “she” – the active role in this relationship is normally the male participant. Žižek argues that the female torturer in a masochistic fantasy receives her own identity and is fulfilling her own erotic interests,¹⁰⁵ but Suzanne Stewart critiques him for describing these women as little more than props in a male masochist’s scenario. Žižek claims that the fact that this torturer is a prop in the masochist’s erotic scene, the fact that she appears to be in control but is actually acting out a script that the masochist has written, illustrates the “constructedness of gender relations”¹⁰⁶ and exposes how control, consent and desire are performed fictions. If this is a compelling point, Stewart is not pleased about the fact that it does not truly explain away the problematic detail that women, even in an erotic structure that is supposed to explode traditional notions about sexuality, still need to take a submissive role in a man’s fantasy. This is compounded by the idea that whatever power a woman has in these scenarios is only given to them by a male partner, and it is this same male partner that takes that power away when the scene is over. These theorists do not entertain the conceit that a woman might be the one in control of a masochistic situation; Robert Tobin argues that the idea that a woman might be scripting the scene of her own pleasure and demonstrating an active desire makes many theorists uncomfortable,

¹⁰⁴ “Situating Sadomasochism.” *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadomasochism*. Eds. Langdridge, Darren and Meg Barker (New York: Palgrave, 2007) 3

¹⁰⁵ *Sublime Surrender: Male Masochism at the Fin-de-siècle*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998) 6

even those theorists who claim that masochism is a subversion of gender roles.¹⁰⁷ The very theorists that promote masochism as an alternative form of sexuality are also, it seems, the same writers that consign it to the normative narratives that it is intended to demolish.

I have taken this pause to discuss contemporary views on masochism because I feel that it is an important context for thinking about how masochism developed in early modernity. I wanted to make sure that I explored these contemporary views before I returned to the early modern period in the last part of this introduction; in other words, I have worked backwards in these last two sections, explaining how we think about masochism today before I turn again to how masochism was articulated on the early modern stage. The thinkers that I discussed in the preceding pages, particularly Deleuze and the writers that are inspired by him, will have an important role in my analysis of the early modern theater and its expression of masochism. Deleuze's comments about masochistic theatricality and how masochists create an erotic *mise en scene* will be foundational for how I think about the early modern theater and uncover its emerging strands of masochistic desire. When I have finished this discussion, I will finally elaborate on the body of this project, and will break down each of my four chapters and what texts and themes will be important to each of them.

Masochism and the Theater

One of the elements that makes masochism such a particular form of desire is its intense theatricality. Deleuze has done the most to theorize this approach to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 8

¹⁰⁷ Tobin, Robert. "Masochism and Identity." *One Hundred Years of Masochism: Literary Texts, Social and Cultural Contexts*. Eds. Finke, Michael and Carl Niekerk (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) 33-4

masochism. He asserts that it is a formal event: everything must look and feel a certain way, and certain props and elements must be in place for the moment of desire to achieve its full effect. The masochist does not engage in a masochistic scene without a great deal of preparation; if such a scene appears to be spontaneous or random, it is only because it has been precisely arranged to appear that way. These scenes are extremely ritualistic, and everyone involved in them has to perform according to the pre-established script. The more precisely the torturer looks and behaves according to the terms of the ritual, the more potent and powerful the pleasure that the masochist feels. Deleuze finds that in these fantasies the torturer is often depicted as “frozen” or suspended in the poses or postures that are most erotic to the masochist.¹⁰⁸ The masochist wants to freeze these moments and analyze them; he wishes to suspend reality so that he can better conduct a “scientific observation”¹⁰⁹ of the exact seconds in which he is most ridiculed, most humiliated, most dominated, made to feel the most pain, and so on. In this way, pleasure is prolonged and postponed for as long as possible;¹¹⁰ the scene is split up into so many frozen images that the masochist might never even reach the moment of orgasm.

Deleuze asserts that the staging of the masochistic drama, with all of its sets and props, is more “important to the masochist than the moment of orgasm.”¹¹¹ This staging is so precise and ritualistic that the masochist cannot trust just anyone to torture and abuse him: he needs to find, recruit and train his torturer in order to make

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze 33

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 409

sure that the scene is properly staged and the torturer plays the role in the right way.¹¹² The masochist is, in other words, a willing victim in search of a torturer, and the torturer that the masochist finds needs to be educated in how to correctly humiliate and punish him.¹¹³ The torturer in the masochistic experience is not always a sadist or someone who enjoys punishing and inflicting pain; she is an element in the experience, deeply embroiled in its structure.¹¹⁴ It may appear that the masochist is under the strict control of the torturer, but Deleuze states that it is actually the exact opposite; it is the masochist who “forms her, dresses her for the part and prompts the harsh words she addresses to him.”¹¹⁵ The masochist has control over the entire event, and he is its designer and director; part of the pleasure of these masochistic scenes, however, comes from a disavowal that he has any control at all, and from claiming that he is completely dominated by the torturer who seems to have such power over him. Peter Cosgrove offers an important insight here: he argues that the masochist is “simultaneously playwright and audience”¹¹⁶ because he crafts this scene but then appears to passively receive it as if he has had nothing to do its creation. He is an active participant in the pain that is inflicted on him, but it is vital to his fantasy that he looks like he is helpless and at the mercy of a much more powerful figure. The masochist would be upset if he is not beaten or humiliated in the right way, if he is not treated with the degree of harshness that he has instructed his torturer to use, and if the all props and essential elements of the *mise en scene* are not arranged in the specified

¹¹² Ibid. 20

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 42

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 22

¹¹⁶ “Subversive Image” 409

manner.

The theatricality of masochistic desire is especially prominent on the early modern stage. Early modern dramas are filled with characters that script themselves into harmful or painful situations, precisely designing everything that happens to them and completely organizing these experiences. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, Shylock's daughter Jessica appears at first to be an innocent young woman who becomes caught up in the religious and legal struggle between her father and her new husband Lorenzo's Christian comrades. She seems to be insulted and denigrated by Lorenzo and his friends, who treat her like an outcast. Jessica is not, however, simply an innocent victim: she has designed this entire narrative for herself, and the play is clear about the ways that she has dressed herself in certain clothes, crafted a particular *mise en scene*, and even anticipated the reactions and behaviors of other characters. The play suggests that she has recruited these Christian characters because marrying a Christian and surrounding herself with Christian invective will make her feel ashamed and humiliated. This is not, however, a bad thing: it is the way that this character expresses erotic desire. In the same play, Antonio's desires are depicted with a similar masochistic logic. Antonio seeks out Shylock, the character most likely to hate him, and signs a contract that all but guarantees that his life will be in Shylock's hands. If Antonio is the "willing victim in search of a torturer" that I referred to earlier, Shylock is a torturer that does not need to be trained; he is already disposed to be as cruel to Antonio as possible, and to pursue his contract to the strictest letter of the law. Jessica and Antonio both claim that they are at the mercy of someone else, when they are in fact the ones responsible for everything that has happened to them.

These characters author their own masochistic narratives; at the same time, however, they are also spectators, watching their narratives play out as they sit silently on the sidelines or occasionally contribute a self-pitying monologue to help move the action along and ensure that it reaches its desired conclusion. In these moments, the masochist appears to be simply “watching” what is happening and not “doing” anything. Jessica hangs back from her husband and his Christian friends, watching quietly as they abuse and harass her father – she does not even comment when they insult her, and instead defers to her husband or even joins in on their anti-Semitic language. Antonio constantly insists that he is a helpless victim, and leaves himself in the hands of Portia, Shylock and the court. He is like an animal being led to the slaughter, and everyone but him has a say in what will happen to him – he can only sit back and watch these events as they transpire. Jessica and Antonio are not, however, simply watching what happens; these scenes may stress their passivity, but they have both actually been the active figures all along, scripting and organizing everything that happens. What the early modern stage reveals, then, is that spectatorship does not necessarily have to be a passive role. It is possible to be an active viewer, fully implicated in what you are watching and even, in some way, responsible for the action that is being staged. Jessica and Antonio have crafted these scenes in such a way that they will be able to sit back as audience members and watch the plot as if they did not design it. In other words, if you want to see your kind of play, you’ll have to write it yourself – though, in this case, part of the appeal of creating the play is in claiming that you are simply an audience member and disavowing that you’ve had anything to do with its creation.

The masochist is always a spectator of the masochistic scene; he or she watches it unfold and acts like an audience member. Does this mean, however, that being an ordinary audience member – one who has not scripted the scene that is playing out in front of her, or who is not a masochist – can also be an active role? Is it possible for any audience member to be active? Is paying for a ticket and watching the play an active form of participation? Does it matter if an audience member says nothing or has no reaction? Does he or she need to laugh, cry, heckle, or comment on the play in order to be considered an active viewer? I argue that there were a number of early modern plays that invited any audience member to think of himself as an active viewer. I go further to claim that, because one of the early modern theater's models for active spectatorship was masochism, this led to plays that created a masochistic dynamic between the stage and the audience. One example of this dynamic is Ben Jonson's city comedy *Bartholomew Fair*, which opens with a long and dry induction; in this induction, the stage manager coerces the audience into signing a contract with the stage. The audience must agree to enjoy what they see, and, as the play is filled with insults, beatings and humiliations, much of this pleasure would come from moments of cruelty and hardship. This cruelty would not, however, be isolated to the stage; audience members would also be expected to take pleasure in the play being cruel to *them*, and to enjoy the play calling them naïve, foolish, and ignorant. This not the only model that the early modern stage offers us for thinking about active spectatorship, but it is surely one of the most compelling and original, and it allows us to see masochism as more than a structure of erotic desire – it can be a structure for watching and enjoying a play.

The first two chapters in this dissertation will both focus on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and I will deeply discuss Jessica and Antonio's masochistic desires. My first chapter, "Jessica, the lack of community, and the pleasures of shame", will read Jessica's humiliation and alienation at the hands of Lorenzo and his Christian cohort as a masochistic narrative that she has designed for herself. She betrays her father, gives up his wealth and marries Lorenzo, one of his enemies, in return receiving the pleasures of guilt and shame. In my second chapter, "Bondage, the public marketplace, and Antonio's body as a commodity", I highlight the bond that is made between Shylock and Antonio, and I demonstrate that Antonio intentionally binds himself into a situation that he is aware will lead to pain and suffering. He acts like he is completely helpless and totally at the mercy of Shylock and his rigorous legalese, but he has, in fact, entirely designed this situation for himself. In my third chapter, "The benefits of being a wittol in early modern city comedies", I will concentrate on a striking figure from early modern culture; this figure is the wittol, or a cuckold who realizes that he is being cuckolded and actually enjoys the experience. The major example of this figure is the contented wittol Allwit in Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, who is more than happy that his wife is sleeping with her lover, the pimp and con artist Sir Walter Whorehound. In my last chapter, "Insulting the audience and masochistic spectatorship in *Bartholomew Fair*", I will turn my attention to one of the most important characters in this project: the members of the early modern audience that attended all of these plays. I will especially focus on the bizarre induction to Jonson's bitter comedy, and will describe the way that it coerces its audience into signing what ultimately amounts to a masochistic contract.

This project is an attempt to rediscover masochism as a critical and literary term. I want to write and think about how an alternative form of desire gets expressed on the stage, and to tease out the different ways that this desire is acted out by literary characters, received by period audiences, and understood by contemporary critics. I also want to see this desire as an early modern concept, and to show how the early modern period was instrumental in creating the logic and language of pleasurable pain that we see today as the modern concept of masochism. My ultimate hope is that this project is a contribution to early modern studies and the way that critics approach depictions of sexuality in literary texts. I discuss these contributions at greater length in this project's conclusion, in which I offer final thoughts and a summation of my argument that brings together the many claims I have made throughout my four chapters.

CHAPTER I

Jessica, the lack of community, and the pleasures of shame in *The Merchant of Venice*

Jessica has been of increasing interest to recent critics of *The Merchant of Venice*, who see her as an emblematic figure for the play's uncomfortable disharmonies. Critics such as Mary Metzger, Julia Lupton and Janet Adelman have demonstrated that Jessica is caught between the Jewish ancestry she has rejected and the Christian community she has married into but that does not accept her. She remains an alien to her husband's Christian friends; her Jewish origins hang over her head and make her ultimately impossible to integrate. Gratiano openly calls her an "infidel",¹¹⁷ which, comic ribbing or not, reaffirms her essential strangeness in the company of trueborn Christians. Lorenzo's other friends simply ignore her, and Adelman has considered the effect of Jessica being "physically isolated on the stage"¹¹⁸ for the majority of the last act, awkwardly speechless and clearly outside the privileged circle of comic banter and Christian camaraderie that connects the other characters. In addition, they point out that Jessica's conversion affects more than her own identity and social position; it is the first nail in her father's coffin, and he ends the play not only humiliated and spiritually lost but must face this trial without the support of his daughter. Heather Hirschfield finds that her conversion enhances the sting of Shylock's financial and spiritual losses and gives them a violently debilitating

¹¹⁷ Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Leah S. Marcus (New York: Norton, 2006) 3.2.222

¹¹⁸ *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 73

emotional meaning.¹¹⁹ In the end, Jessica is left an outsider to both of Venice's represented communities. She has abandoned her father, rejected her ancestral tradition, and has no native community to return to. In return, she is surrounded by strangers and their unknown customs in a strange and alienating new context that will never really be her own – she is left alone, unwanted, and without the certainties she could once rely on.

These critics have posited that Jessica receives a higher reward for her condition. If she is not accepted by the Christians, she has still been given membership in the normative religious and political world she had been excluded from. Lupton calls her a “citizen-saint”,¹²⁰ her struggle almost a form of martyrdom that helps cement the idea of a civic community and makes smooth the road for future citizens and converters. She claims that Jessica suffers now so that it will be easier for others to convert later on in history. Jessica, in Lupton's analysis, represents all the people who will one day give up their scattered, isolated and local beliefs so that they can enter a larger, unified nation and take on new, national traditions. But how does Jessica feel about her status as a proto-citizen? Is this political benefit, so abstract and intangible, the only benefit that Jessica receives from her situation? Does the play show that there is another benefit to the trial that she has undergone, a benefit that is more immediate and more her own? She appears to be wedged between figures who want to control her or who regard her with disdain or apathy, but could she gain something from these feelings? What other benefits might there be to feeling dejected

¹¹⁹ “‘And he hath enough’: The Penitential Economies of *The Merchant of Venice*.” Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 40.1 (2010) 107

and isolated?

I argue that Jessica receives a very specific, personal benefit from these feelings: pleasure. She is a self-willed character who takes what she wants, and she seems to have achieved what she wants by the end of the play. She is one of the play's most determined and successful playwrights, and has minutely scripted much of what happens to her. The idea that she wants to feel lonely, exiled and humiliated might make readers confused or uncomfortable; if she has scripted these events for her own gain, this would mean that she actually desires hardship. How can these points be reconciled: Jessica's desires on the one hand, and the harsh condition she creates for herself and her father on the other? If critics are right that Jessica's conversion leaves her spiritually and socially lost – and I agree with them – how is it also true that she has apparently orchestrated this for herself? Is it possible that she finds pleasure in her conversion not despite all of its negative effects but, in fact, because of them?

If I call this masochism, it is not because I want to psychoanalyze Jessica or paint for her an inner life that may not have been there to begin with. I do not even want to claim that Jessica has set events in motion *specifically* for her erotic benefit. What I want to show is that Jessica has designed her situation herself. On the surface, it seems that nothing works out for her: her husband regards her as a piece of attractive property, the Christian community ignores or mocks her, and she has caused her father both emotional suffering and financial ruin. If we consider, however, that this status is the result of scenarios that Jessica has designed, directed, staged and performed in, we need to find another language to discuss what she wants and how she gets it. The

¹²⁰ *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

scenes she takes part in are often personally scripted by her, and are guided by a *mise en scene* that she has dictated and organized from afar. These scenes, with their precise attention to detail and staging, have the drive of masochistic fantasy. The process by which they lead to her social and religious situation at the end of the play – abject and ostracized – is like a chemical formula that has been calculated to yield as much unhappiness as possible.

The use of the term “masochism” to discuss or explain this process might give some readers pause. I argue, however, that the language of masochism offers the ideal way to dissect and inspect the desires that are depicted in the play. I will draw on the psychoanalytic history of masochism that I outlined in the introduction, and will use its logic and terminology to understand the narrative that Jessica constructs. I find that her experience recalls the structures of masochism in three major ways. Firstly, she designs a unique *mise en scene* for herself with certain props, dialogue, actors, and so on; secondly, this *mise en scene* cultivates feelings of disgrace and rejection, such as having one's most vulnerable areas laid bare and mocked or being exposed before the community as a fraud and bastard; and thirdly, her experience is not random, arbitrary or unsystematic, but is grounded in the contracts, bonds and contractual thinking that defines the play. This last point is especially important, as Jessica is the most contractually-engaged character in the play – even more than Antonio and Shylock. The critical interest in the play's contracts has almost always been on the bond between Antonio and Shylock or on Portia and Bassanio's marriage, but Jessica enters the lion's share of the play's contracts: she gets married, enters a new religion,

becomes a citizen and inserts herself into the volatile Venetian economy. If these contracts lead to her being oppressed, I want to discuss the other benefits that she may be receiving from them, or whether her oppression might be a benefit in itself

The suggestion that a character receives pleasure from or benefits from oppression is sure to be chafed against. This might be because scholars seem somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of masochistic pleasure. Masochism itself is not the issue – it is a character finding genuine pleasure in that masochism. Karmen MacKendrick notes that while desires like masochism have been legitimated in academic discourse, finding pleasure in those desires remains somehow aberrant and illegitimate.¹²¹ If critics are willing to discuss the effects of masochism, it is almost always in terms of its political ramifications and social implications. This is particularly true of an otherwise quite striking and rich series of articles about masochism, political community and *The Merchant of Venice* by Drew Daniel, Graham Hammill, and Jacques Lezra. The three critics respond to each other in a chain that begins with Daniel, mapping out how cruelty, whether originating in the law or self-inflicted, becomes integral to civic life. Daniel makes some provocative claims about Antonio's ultimate desires, claiming he wants Bassanio to watch him as he is tortured.¹²² Daniel ultimately finds that what the play depicts is not necessarily an individual's violent fantasy but "the subjection of civil subjects to the laws of the city, the subjection of humanity to divine justice."¹²³ Daniel's subtle point draws out two very different kinds of subjection; in some ways, he makes a point that is very similar

¹²¹ *Counterpleasures* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999) 6

¹²² "'Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will'": Melancholy Epistemology and Masochistic Fantasy in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.2 (2010) 220

to my earlier thoughts about Machiavelli, who demands obedience to the prince, and Luther, who demands obedience to God. I want to, however, make a more personal argument that focuses on a character and how her individual desire is dramatized. Hammil, in a similar fashion, also offers a fascinating insight into the play; he writes about how masochists might be attracted to figures that a government labels as dangerous, and he states that masochists defy these warnings and seek out relationships with such people, bringing down on their own heads the reprimand of the state while also giving them a sense of pleasure.¹²⁴ I am very inspired by his reading, but this chapter will be more about personal pleasure than the political arena that Hammil is interested in. When he states that Venice's masochism opens up "a space of civil exchange between Christian and Jew while preserving enmity and anti-Semitism",¹²⁵ I want to see how this can be a pleasurable experience for a person or a character, and how it might have more meaning than as a theoretical exercise.

My point is not to chastise these scholars for connecting masochism to political discourse, but to note that masochistic pleasure is not only about politics and theory. In this chapter, and throughout this project, I will show the ways that masochism is powerfully connected to and implicated in such early modern institutions as the market, the theater, the court, and so on. What is essential, however, is that I do not claim that people have been forced to understand their sexuality in terms of these institutions. If such institutions have become a part of their sexual lives, it might be that ordinary people found a way to use these institutions to fuel their personal

¹²³ Ibid. 228

¹²⁴ "Converting Cruelty and Constituting Community in Shakespeare's Venice: A Response to Drew Daniel." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.2 (2010) 238

fantasies and desires. I argue that these social forces can be used and taken up by people, who can exploit them and turn them into something entirely different. I definitely do not want to claim that is possible to be completely outside of social or political power, but I do want to assert that we should pay attention to how people can be the driving force behind their own desires.

In this chapter, I offer a reading of Jessica that is attuned to masochism as more than just a political practice and that considers the experiences of shame and hardship as experiences of pleasure. This does not mean, however, that the political and social implications of masochism will not factor into this discussion. These contexts will be essential to understanding how Jessica styles herself in this masochistic narrative, how she crafts a “story” out of her surroundings, and how she bends the people, traditions and rituals of both the Christian and Jewish communities to her erotic interests. Her roles as a Venetian citizen, Christian convert, former Jew, newlywed and participant in the market are all raw material that informs and shapes the narrative she creates. I want to show how Jessica is not necessarily at the mercy of larger political forces, but how she employs and exploits those forces for her own pleasure. Does Jessica serve the Venetian government as a symbol of citizenship, helping to clear the way for future citizens, or does she use the apparatus of citizenship as a prop in her personal fantasies? This chapter will suggest that the latter interpretation is possible. I will open the chapter with a discussion of Helena from *All's Well That Ends Well*. I argue that, while Jessica's desires are rather complicated and will take some time to unpack, Helena's masochistic interests are sharper and

¹²⁵ Ibid.

more explicit. In exploring her desires and how she crafts her own *mise en scene*, I want to introduce some of the ideas that will be essential to my close reading of Jessica. I will show how Jessica designs the *mise en scene* of her elopement, and then outline the many consequences of the elopement for herself and her father. I will next discuss Jessica's treatment by the Christian community, especially focusing on her interactions with Portia. The final section of the chapter will detail how Jessica's experiences can be understood as pleasurable when they are read as part of a masochistic narrative, and I will discuss the implications of her narrative on how we think about pleasure in early modern studies.

Helena and Masochism

Helena of *All's Well That Ends Well* is, in a sense, an even more abject figure than Jessica. She places herself into situations that will cause her absolutely explicit humiliation; the shame she suffers is palpably obvious, unlike the more subtle, implied shame and regret that we will discuss in Jessica's narrative. Helena asks for Bertram's hand in marriage; this is despite the fact that she comes from a lower social class, has no money of her own, and is a ward of the state. She compares him to "a bright particular star"¹²⁶ that she can barely gaze at, much less hope to marry. He is like the "sun, that looks upon his worshipper/But knows of him no more"¹²⁷ – a celestial object that does not or cannot take notice of the insignificant, smaller objects around him. By requesting his hand, Helena has consciously placed herself in an orbit that is dangerously beyond her ken. It may not be surprising to her, then, that Bertram reacts

¹²⁶ Shakespeare, William. *All's Well That Ends Well*. The Norton Shakespeare, 2nd Ed. Based on the Oxford Edition. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus. New York: Norton, 1997. 1.1.81

to her request with a complete dismissal. He insults her social position and essentially asserts that it would be better to live in exile than to marry a woman like her. She is left thoroughly embarrassed; Bertram brings on his head the reprimand of the court and the wrath of the king, but all this is preferable to spending his life with her. His reaction is shared by at least two of the other lords that Helena examines as potential husbands; David Kay argues that these two lords are just as reluctant to be married to Helena, but that they must hide their feelings in the name of decorum.¹²⁸ The court is compelled to pity Helena, and she is turned into a sort of curiosity or sideshow that members of the court can stare at from the corner of their eye and whisper about to one another. The play is filled with scenes of gossip and characters reporting on what other characters are doing, where they are going and what people are saying about them; even if Helena is not maligned by every character in the play, she realizes that she will be pursued by “pitiful rumor”¹²⁹ and that everyone will know about and comment on her predicament. Parolles spreads her story around Florence so that even Diana, who has no relationship to the Parisian court, is fully aware of what has happened and can express pity over it.¹³⁰ Helena has no safe space to feel comfortable and secure, but is needled by condescending public scrutiny on the one hand and, on the other, assured that she is unwanted and undesired by the very man that she has built all of her fantasies around.

The play is insistent, however, in showing how prepared Helena has been for

¹²⁷ 1.3.190-1

¹²⁸ Kay, W. David. “Reforming the Prodigal: Dramatic Paradigms, Male Sexuality, and the Power of Shame in *All's Well That Ends Well*.” Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein, Ed. Evelyn Gajowski. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004) 113

¹²⁹ 3.3.127

this sort of reaction. When she offers to heal the king's illness, he asks her what punishment she will undergo if she is unsuccessful. She answers that, in case of failure, she is willing to face all the shame and humiliation that the court and the public can muster against her:

Tax of impudence,
A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame;
Traduced by odious ballads, my maiden's name
Sear'd otherwise, nay – worse of worst – extended
With vilest torture.¹³¹

Her operation is successful, but she ends up dealing with these very consequences when she asks for Bertram's hand in marriage. The cause is different, but the result is exactly the same: her desires are revealed but tramped on, she is shamed in front of the court, and her name is dragged through the mud in public. She is mired in the adversities that she imagined for herself, and must undergo more if she is ever going to resolve these issues, but she has already steeled herself to face them. Helena resembles a medieval martyr, fully aware of all the trials that will be imposed on her but also prepared to suffer through them. There is certainly a religious quality to her situation, and Helena seems to embrace the language of religious martyrdom. She realizes she should not long for Bertram, but she states she is "Religious in mine error",¹³² driven by divine attraction to love him. She undergoes her hardships with a religiously "zealous fervor",¹³³ worships his possessions and "relics"¹³⁴ with an

¹³⁰ 3.5.53-6

¹³¹ 2.1.169-73

¹³² 1.3.189

¹³³ 3.4.11

¹³⁴ 1.1.93

“idolatrous fancy”,¹³⁵ and curses herself as a wretched “caitiff”¹³⁶ for having disturbed Bertram’s sacrosanct life. She makes plans to “barefoot plod...the cold ground”¹³⁷ on an arduous religious pilgrimage to make amends for her irreligious behavior, holding in her heart a “sainted vow”¹³⁸ to bring peace back to her idol. Helena is extremely competent in this religious language, and at times seems almost too prepared to accept the role of martyr. She immerses herself in this role, surrounding herself with its iconography, lacing her dialogue with its imagery and performing it with the energy of a true believer. The reader might begin to wonder whether this role has really been imposed on her, or whether she might be in some sense complicit with her situation.

This is because Helena has designed this role for herself. When she presents herself to Bertram as a groveling penitent and religiously dutiful servant, he has no idea how to respond. She calls herself his “obedient servant”,¹³⁹ and assures him that she will, with “true observance”,¹⁴⁰ honor the “great fortune”¹⁴¹ that her “homely stars”¹⁴² saw fit to grace her with by giving her his hand in marriage. Bertram can only awkwardly tell her to “Let that go”¹⁴³ and ask her to stop using this sort of language – “Come, come, no more of that.”¹⁴⁴ He does not know what to make of Helena’s behavior; it is clear that he has no interest in or any real understanding of her religious devotion and readiness for servitude. Bertram has not imposed this role on her; on the

¹³⁵ 1.1.92

¹³⁶ 3.3.114

¹³⁷ 3.4.6

¹³⁸ 3.4.7

¹³⁹ 2.5.68

¹⁴⁰ 2.5.70

¹⁴¹ 2.5.72

¹⁴² 2.5.71

¹⁴³ 2.5.72

¹⁴⁴ 2.5.69

contrary, she has personally sculpted and cultivated it, and insists on its use. She will tell anyone who listens that he is her “master” and “dear lord”,¹⁴⁵ and that she “will his vassal die”;¹⁴⁶ she dutifully reports that in “everything I wait upon his will”¹⁴⁷ and that she will obey all of his desires. This is despite the fact that she has had barely any interactions with him in the play, and has little clue as to what his desires might be. It is not, then, Bertram’s desires that she is interested in, but her own. She barely needs Bertram to participate in her design, and certainly does not need even significant input from him; she is the one in control of her servitude, who decides its contents and how it is directed. Kathryn Schwarz offers a helpful insight when she claims that “Helena’s particular desire at once makes Bertram her master and marks him as a product of her own intractable compliance.”¹⁴⁸ When Helena asks the king for Bertram’s hand, her language is very telling: “I dare not say I take you, but I give/Me and my service ever whilst I live/Into your guiding power.”¹⁴⁹ Helena “dares not” admit that she is in the one in charge of this transaction, that she has drafted its terms and that it is in her power to begin and end, but her command of the situation is obvious even if implied. She takes control by giving herself, and it is Bertram, though ostensibly the master figure, who is enlisted for use in and made subservient to another’s erotic scheme. He will need to be properly trained as a master; when Michelle Dowd claims that “Helena takes on the task of educating the recalcitrant Bertram,”¹⁵⁰ she does not mean that he has been placed in a masochistic situation, but her insight into the pedagogical

¹⁴⁵ 1.3.141

¹⁴⁶ 1.3.142

¹⁴⁷ 2.4.51

¹⁴⁸ “My intents are fix'd: Constant Will in *All's Well That Ends Well*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.2 (2007) 220

dynamic between the two characters is enlightening. Bertram must be molded into the master that Helena imagines for herself, a partner who can perform his role without being prompted. The characters around Helena are often pulled into her educational orbit; even the king is taken in by the pedagogical energy of her language, incorporating her unique phrases into his own dialogue and unknowingly making himself a part of her narrative design.¹⁵¹

Helena has constructed a masochistic narrative. What at first appears to have been inflicted on her is in fact the product of her personal design. If she is needled by hurtful rumors, she has spread many of them herself. If she is an object of public pity, she has organized this herself. If her inferiority to Bertram is not all in her imagination – he does, after all, flee from court rather than marry her – she has nevertheless designed this narrative herself, predicted how he would react to her request, and continued to instruct him in the properly masterful behavior that she fantasizes about. What does Helena gain in all this? I argue that she takes pleasure in this narrative, and that masochistic pleasure is the right term to use. She states that gazing at Bertram is “pretty, though plague”;¹⁵² it is a pleasurable experience, and makes her feel good, but it eats away at her life like a crippling disease. She feels shame, but she enjoys it, cultivates it and helps it to grow. She is humiliated, but is complicit in and helps to increase her own humiliation. Helena, late in the play, makes a statement that shows how deeply she understands these pleasures: “O strange men,/That can such sweet use

¹⁴⁹ 2.3.98-100

¹⁵⁰ *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. (New York: Palgrave, 2011) 166

¹⁵¹ Schwarz 224

¹⁵² 1.1.87

make of what they hate.”¹⁵³ She is referring to Bertram’s unwitting tenderness toward her during the bed-trick, but this could just as easily apply to her own pleasures. If one has the right mindset and the right inclination, one can transform hateful experiences like shame, rejection and hardship into pleasures.

It has been difficult for some critics to see the pleasure in Helena’s behavior. In an older argument on the play, Diane Elizabeth Dreher finds that Helena gets no pleasure from her pursuit of Bertram because she has “completely overlooked the ritualistic significance of courtship.”¹⁵⁴ On the contrary, her courtship process is extremely ritualistic and systematic; it is simply difficult for critics to recognize because it does not look like traditional early modern courtship (though one of the arguments of this project is that this sort of courtship is more typical than it at first appears to be). Shame and hardship are not inconvenient accidents of this ritual, but are vitally central to it. Her narrative “ritualizes shame”,¹⁵⁵ alongside all the rejection and humiliation she experiences, and turns them into a source of pleasure. If the Countess and Lavatch, her clown, seem the most sympathetic to Helena, it is perhaps because they understand something themselves about masochistic pleasures; the clown responds to some of the Countess’ comments by screaming “O Lord, sir! – Nay, put me to’t, I warrant you”¹⁵⁶ and “O Lord, sir! – Spare not me”,¹⁵⁷ treating her words as strokes from a whip and encouraging her to continue. The Countess notices that “your

¹⁵³ 4.4.21-2

¹⁵⁴ *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare*. (Lexington, KT: University of Kentucky Press, 1986) 140

¹⁵⁵ Fernie, Ewan. *Shame in Shakespeare*. (London: Routledge, 2002) 22

¹⁵⁶ 2.2.42

¹⁵⁷ 2.2.44

‘O Lord, sir!’ is very sequest to your whipping”,¹⁵⁸ and jokes that “You would answer very well to a whipping, if you were but bound to’t.”¹⁵⁹ Lavatch reveals that he finds pleasure in being whipped by his masters, and the Countess, while amused, is not surprised. The two show an understanding of, if not out and out participation in, the experience of taking pleasure in pain – at least when it is in the proper context and on the masochist’s own terms.

Helena’s narrative is grounded in a deeply contractual thinking. Her pleasures are not anarchic or random, but are based on contracts that validate them and provide them with a guiding structure. The most obvious of these contracts is her marriage with Bertram, but she spends much of the play trying to make sure that this contract is upheld. This may be one of the reasons that critics are so quick to accuse Helena of being aggressive and mercenary; the contract that should underpin her masochistic narrative is on very shaky ground, and if the contract collapses or is rendered null then her pleasures will lack one of the lynchpins that drive a masochistic experience. It might seem, then, that Helena’s religiously fervent pursuit of Bertram is a desperate attempt to secure her masochistic pleasures through a valid contract. It is true, however, that she always has another contract supporting her during this pursuit: her agreement with the king. When she promises to heal the king in exchange for a reward of her own choosing – marriage to one of his aristocrats – she binds herself into a contract as solid and legally viable as the marriage contract itself. Her contract with the king is even more valid than a marriage contract, as it is formed between a sovereign and his subject. His word is law, and the court will not contradict or void a

¹⁵⁸ 2.2.45

contract that he has made. Helena is not simply pushing herself on Bertram without the legal wherewithal to back it up; she will always be able to point back to her contract with the king, legitimating her behavior that might otherwise be seen as indecorous or inappropriate (though many critics have nevertheless claimed exactly this). Helena's narrative is never without one contract or the other to support and shape it; if her marriage contract with Bertram is disputed, she can rely on her agreement with the king. Kathryn Schwarz finds that there is even a third contract implicit in Helena's contract with the king: it is an invisible "contract forged as much between actor and audience as between woman and man, subject and monarch, or physician and patient."¹⁶⁰ Helena's claim that she will be able to heal an illness that has stumped every doctor in the kingdom requires our sympathy and suspension of disbelief, encouraging our investment in her character and her desires. The audience is thus made an unwitting guarantor on her masochistic narrative, offering her its implicit contractual obligation to believe in and uphold her narrative project. The audience, like so many other characters in the play, is enlisted as a coordinate in her masochistic *mise en scene*, and becomes a complicit co-signer on the contract she requires to carry out her narrative.

Scholars have been uncomfortable or confused when talking about the way that the play depicts Helena's desires. She has been called an "androgynous" figure, feminine in her perceived passivity and masculine in her active pursuit of what she wants.¹⁶¹ Her will to servitude means that she cannot be labeled masculine, but her

¹⁵⁹ 2.2.47

¹⁶⁰ "Constant Will" 214

¹⁶¹ Dreher 136

independent attitude and the energy with which she pursues her interests means she cannot be labeled feminine. In an article on the bed-trick, David McCandless takes this reading a step further; he claims that Helena's androgynous status actually "desexualizes her erotic agency",¹⁶² making her into an almost sexless character who has no interest in her physical sexuality. Diana is her stand-in during the bed-trick because she is Helena's "sexualized double";¹⁶³ she does not want to be associated with physical sexual activity until the last possible moment when she finally reveals that Bertram has gotten her pregnant. Kathryn Schwarz, on the other hand, asserts that Helena is the height of femininity, "an outrageously intentional, sexual, articulate, and efficient femininity that runs amok without doing anything wrong."¹⁶⁴ She takes stereotypical femininity to its masochistic limit, using subservience and compliance as tools in her almost subversive erotic scheme. Critics cannot seem to agree on how her desires mark her; she might be a woman, she might be both a woman and a man at once, or she might be neither. She is either extremely sexually assured, in complete control of her sexual life, or absolutely uninterested in having a sexual life in the first place.

I feel that part of the reason for these divergent readings is a critical inability or discomfort with talking about or understanding masochism and masochistic pleasures (Schwarz gets close by detailing how Helena uses the expectations of femininity for her own purposes). If a character has an alternative way of expressing sexual desire, she may be androgynous; if a character organizes the terms in which her own

¹⁶² "Helena's Bed-trick: Gender and Performance in *All's Well That Ends Well*." Shakespeare Quarterly 45 (1994) 450

¹⁶³ Ibid.

humiliation and shame take place, she may not actually like or understand sex at all. I find that thinking about Helena's narrative as a masochistic experience is the closest way we have to reading how she expresses her desires and puts them into practice; the work these critics have done, while often sharp and insightful, can sometimes overstretch and miss the mark, so that the Helena that they describe and the Helena we see in the play are very different figures. It is, of course, a complicated subject. Pinpointing exactly how and why a character desires is, perhaps, a fool's errand, and ascribing masochism to someone carries a great deal of intellectual and cultural baggage. How does a critic claim that a character not only enjoys the oppression and pain they are suffering, but has perhaps designed this suffering and brought it on their own heads? What are the ethical implications of a scholar making this sort of claim? I will spend the rest of this chapter on *The Merchant of Venice* and Jessica's narrative, working to answer these questions and striving to notice the ways that pleasure might be present in the most counterintuitive situations.

The Scene of the Crime

When Lorenzo and his cronies arrive at Shylock's house to spirit Jessica away, they speak of their attempt in terms of hunting and thieving. Gratiano jokes that prey is "with more spirit chased than enjoyed",¹⁶⁵ implying that Lorenzo has pursued Jessica and now has her firmly in his trap (though the resulting sexual conquest won't be as fulfilling as Lorenzo hopes and will leave him "Lean, rent, and beggared"¹⁶⁶). Lorenzo, showing up late to find his friends prepared and anxiously waiting, assures

¹⁶⁴ "Constant Will" 207

¹⁶⁵ 2.6.14

¹⁶⁶ 2.6.20

them “When you please to play the thieves for wives,/I’ll watch as long for you then.”¹⁶⁷ Their comments rehearse the typical rhetoric of sonnets – the beloved as prey to be tracked, chased and captured, or as a treasure to be stolen through wit and cunning. These romantic clichés suggest that Lorenzo and his group are the masterminds behind Jessica’s escape, but it is Jessica who has orchestrated this plot and personally designed its *mise en scene*. Early in the scene, Lorenzo confesses to his friends the extent to which Jessica has written the parts they are playing:

I must needs tell thee all: she hath directed
How I shall take her from her father’s house,
What gold and jewels she is furnished with,
What page’s suit she hath in readiness.¹⁶⁸

She has directed Lorenzo *how* to take her, and has decided on the props, the dialogue, the staging – you will arrive at this time, you will say this, this is how the scene will look, this is what I’ll be wearing, etc. If the scene sounds familiar, if it recalls the language and setting of sonnets or romances, if it seems sleazy or mercenary, she has designed it that way. In this tableau, she is both playwright and performer. Lorenzo appears at least dimly aware of this when he notes that his friends will someday *play* thieves for wives just as he does now; he is taking up the role of the thief in Jessica’s script, and his friends share the role of accomplices to the theft. Their role is even, in a sense, doubled. They are cast as watchmen and lookouts, but they are also an audience, there to watch and look on, seeing how Jessica is degrading herself and selling herself off to Lorenzo. Launcelot seems to already know the part that Jessica has assigned Lorenzo and his friends when he prophesizes that a Christian will

¹⁶⁷ 2.6.24-5

¹⁶⁸ 2.4.32-5

eventually “play the knave”¹⁶⁹ and carry her off. If Lorenzo has not actually told Launcelot about the part that he has playing, the latter has perhaps intuited something about the desires of his master’s daughter.

Jessica plays a role as well; the play demonstrates how she casts herself as the remorseful daughter, afraid of betraying her father but also fascinated by Lorenzo and the community he represents. She may feel bad about leaving home, but she is compelled to do so by the allure of Christian salvation, rationalizing the “heinous sin”¹⁷⁰ of abandoning her father as worth the chance to “Become a Christian and...loving wife.”¹⁷¹ If her father must suffer for conversion, this is part of the Christian plan and must be endured. Adelman finds that she “marries to convert instead of converting to marry”¹⁷², so drawn is she to Christianity and Christians. It is a matter almost beyond her control; if she is to experience the Christian life, she must put herself in the hands of providence, relying on “fortune”¹⁷³ and the hope that Lorenzo will “keep [the] promise”¹⁷⁴ of marriage that he has made to her. The scene of her escape, so illicit and scandalous, is unfortunate but necessary due to Shylock’s watchfulness and the implicitly prying eyes of community figures like Tubal and Chus, who are later on able to gather information about her behavior and report back to her father. Jessica’s role is predicated on the idea that one or all of these forces have backed her into a corner, and she now has no choice but to escape in the middle of the night. In the end, however, it is not Christian fortune, Lorenzo or her father that are

¹⁶⁹ 2.3.11

¹⁷⁰ 2.3.15

¹⁷¹ 2.3.20

¹⁷² *Blood Relations* 71

¹⁷³ 2.5.54

responsible for the scene. Jessica has sculpted its visual and narrative specifics from behind the curtain and continues to direct them even as she acts them out.

Jessica's role in the elopement makes her a criminal. This applies, of course, to the theft of her father's money, but Shylock's hoarding might be seen by the audience as counter to the public good and Jessica's theft as a good deed that returns his ducats to a free-flowing economic network that could benefit Christian merchants.¹⁷⁵ The more damning crime is elopement itself. Eloping with an heiress was a serious crime in the sixteenth century,¹⁷⁶ linked with kidnapping and rape,¹⁷⁷ and Jessica could be held accountable as a co-conspirator. Punishment would come from the state as well as the church, which held that elopements were sinfully clandestine and required penance from those involved.¹⁷⁸ She has entered a new religion and immediately suffers a penalty from it. Jessica also faces the censure of her old religion, comparing unfavorably to Jewish heroines like Jephthah's daughter, willing to sacrifice herself to honor her father's vow to God,¹⁷⁹ and Laban's daughter Rachel, who flees with Jacob but keeps her father's household gods.¹⁸⁰ Jessica instead disregards her father's vows and rejects the sanctity of his house, which she claims is "hell."¹⁸¹ She has abandoned her past ties so completely that Julia Lupton calls her conversion a "total eclipse",¹⁸²

¹⁷⁴ 2.3.19

¹⁷⁵ Bailey, Amanda. "Shylock and the Slaves: Owing and Owning in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.1 (2011) 5

¹⁷⁶ Sokol, B.J. and Mary. *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 2003)

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¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 106

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 93

¹⁷⁹ Ephraim, Michelle. "Jephthah's Kin: The Sacrificing Father in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5.2 (2005) 74

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 85

¹⁸¹ 2.3.2

¹⁸² *Citizen-Saints* 76

an evacuation of the family loyalty and religious conviction that her father holds dear. Jessica's wholesale severing of these past relationships has a precedent in saint's lives,¹⁸³ but, as noted, she enters Christianity as a thief and eloper who needs to be reprimanded, a criminal and at least morally suspect figure. She has discarded the biblical models of the obedient, pious Jewish daughter that Rachel and Jephthah's daughter offer, but also finds no secure place in a Christian environment that chastises her actions and regards her with suspicion. She has no safe or recognizable role to play, but is stuck in an emotional and spiritual limbo.

The play is clear that Jessica is aware of the effect that her elopement will have on her father. Her escape seems to find inspiration in all of Shylock's paranoid anxieties. He has asked his daughter to lock up his house and keep it safe, trusting her with its keys. She is implored to box up the "house's ears"¹⁸⁴ against the depraved racket of Christian partygoing; if even "the sound of shallow foppery"¹⁸⁵ enters his house, its sobriety and piety will be disrupted. Shylock returns home to find his money stolen, Jessica gone, and his house's windows presumably wide open. To make matters worse, Jessica has even married exactly one of the "Christian fools with varnished faces"¹⁸⁶ that he warned her about. Shylock is left looking like the fool, and is exposed before his enemies as impotent. His much-vaunted thrift has not made him beloved to Jessica. Gil Anidjar notes that Shylock's downfall begins with this failure to properly translate his customs and values, his Jewishness, onto his daughter.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Ibid. 86

¹⁸⁴ 2.5.34

¹⁸⁵ 2.5.35

¹⁸⁶ 2.5.33

¹⁸⁷ *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003) 108

Jessica's escape and theft paints Shylock as a bad investor; contrary to the joke he makes about breeding ducats together and producing interest,¹⁸⁸ he has not been able correctly to breed either money *or* children.

Solanio claims that Shylock is heard complaining in the streets about the theft of his "two stones"¹⁸⁹, his procreative masculinity and the patriarchal role related to it having been castrated, stolen and sold. When he insists that "my daughter is my flesh and my blood",¹⁹⁰ Salerio retorts that there is "more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory."¹⁹¹ Shylock is then not merely a Jew, and so subject to the anti-Semitism that permeates Venice, but a Jew who has failed at Jewishness and has not been able to produce a proper Jewish offspring. If Shylock is neither Christian nor Jew, where does he stand? The insults that the Christians use after the theft, such as "dog"¹⁹² and "old carrion"¹⁹³, imply that, because of his inability to control his daughter, Shylock is less than human, a simple animal with no human morality or conscience. Metzger is right to point out that Jessica's ability to integrate into Christianity emphasizes Shylock's status as an alien,¹⁹⁴ but it is perhaps Jessica's theft more than her conversion that is essential to the rhetoric that is used to demean and ridicule her father. It allows the Christians to critique his business sense and mock his sexual potency, but also to call into question his status as an actual person.

In a state of confusion after these losses, Shylock conflates his daughter and

¹⁸⁸ 1.3.93

¹⁸⁹ 2.8.20

¹⁹⁰ 3.1.31

¹⁹¹ 3.1.32-3

¹⁹² 2.8.14

¹⁹³ 3.1.30

¹⁹⁴ "'Now by My Hood, a Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity." *PMLA* 113.1 (1998) 59

the stolen ducats. He cries out “My daughter, O my ducats, O my daughter”,¹⁹⁵ the losses so interchangeable that one collapses into the other. He fantasizes that Jessica were dead at his feet “and the jewels in her ear”¹⁹⁶ or “in her coffin!”¹⁹⁷ She and the ducats are one and the same, property that has been nicked and needs to be returned to its casement. These reactions would not be a surprise to Jessica, who has anticipated and in a sense provoked them in the way she designed her elopement. While fleeing her house, she tells Lorenzo that she will return inside for a moment to “gild myself/With some moe ducats, and be with you straight.”¹⁹⁸ Jessica casts *herself* as a daughter-ducat or, in this case, a wife-ducat. She halts the escape scene because she does not quite look the part yet; she needs to be more gilded, more weighed down by her father’s jewels, more the sign of his ruin and more the confluence point of his paranoid dreams. She has managed to hone in on the *mise en scene* that would most affect him, a *mise en scene* informed by Shylock’s anxiety about her contact with the shallow foppery of the Christians, his deep antipathy for the Christians in general, and the jealousy with which he guards his money. Shylock reinforces this knowledge when, on the night of her escape, he tells her he had a “dream of money bags”¹⁹⁹ and that this dream makes him “right loath”²⁰⁰ to leave his home and meet the Christians. Jessica, with this information, allows her father to come home and see, in a sort of nightmare logic, that either his money bags have sprouted legs and fled in the shape of his daughter or his daughter has changed into a ducat and been carried off in a

¹⁹⁵ 2.8.15

¹⁹⁶ 3.1.74-5

¹⁹⁷ 3.1.76

¹⁹⁸ 2.6.51-2

¹⁹⁹ 2.5.19

Christian's pocket. It is almost as if she is marking off a checklist of Shylock's most debilitating fears, and has found a way of incorporating them into the plot and iconography of her elopement. This may sound sadistic, but the point is that her own masochistic suffering will be more pronounced and dynamic if she knows that her father is also suffering: she makes him suffer so that she can feel guilty and ashamed.

Jessica's theft does more than rob her father of his property and his rights over her as a Jewish daughter; as Anita Sherman notes, the theft disrupts his "understanding of the world",²⁰¹ pulling the emotional and spiritual rug out from under his feet. The precepts by which he has led his life are proven false or naïve, and ultimately inferior to the Christian way. His thrift, which seemed so vital to his success and his sense of self, has ended in betrayal and loss; meanwhile, Bassanio's careless risks have earned him financial and sexual triumph.²⁰² Bassanio's success is almost a flaunting of the power of Christian faith, and a mockery of Shylock's antiquated relationship to a God who can't help him protect his money or his children. Shylock has taught Jessica the proverb "Fast bind, fast find",²⁰³ instructing her to lock up her goods and ration them carefully with a "thrifty mind."²⁰⁴ But thrift is not a virtue in this Christian community, and she instead spends her ducats freely, including fourscore in a single night.²⁰⁵ Jessica is not punished by society for her behavior, but is welcomed and presumably encouraged to spend more. If Shylock's financial sense is proven

²⁰⁰ 2.5.17

²⁰¹ "Disowning Knowledge of Jessica, or Shylock's Skepticism." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44.2 (2004) 278

²⁰² Hutson, Lorna. *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 228

²⁰³ 2.5.54

²⁰⁴ 2.5.55

²⁰⁵ 3.1.91

outdated, his emotional life is shown up as misplaced and empty. Jessica sells her mother's ring "for a monkey";²⁰⁶ her legacy carries as much value as an exotic pet or a hated Christian husband. If hearing about Jessica's spending feels like being stabbed,²⁰⁷ hearing that she sold the ring is like actual torture.²⁰⁸ Shylock recalls that he "had it of Leah when I was a bachelor"²⁰⁹, a sentimental connection to his marriage and the wife he has lost, but also a reminder of his early days in the Jewish community as a young man. Jessica's sale rejects this past and its history, tradition and duty. Shylock's values and beliefs, the way he interacts with society and religion, his inner life, are all revealed to be outdated and irrelevant. Jessica gives her father a more thorough and practical economic lesson than he was ever able to teach her, demonstrating that cash and emotion circulate in this Christian community with a callous spontaneity that brooks no sentimentality and knows no past or tradition.

I dwell so much on how Jessica's elopement has affected Shylock because the ruin and humiliation she has caused him affects her as well. In the first place, while her theft casts Shylock as symbolically impotent, the implication does not bode well for her either; if her father is impotent, she may not be his legitimate child. If she is a bastard, she would be morally suspect to an early modern audience that was highly suspicious of illegitimacy and its influence on human nature. It would also mean that she had no right to the ducats she absconded with; she has stolen property she would never have inherited. If she really is Shylock's child, her prospects are not much better; her origins and right to the ducats may be legitimate, but she would never be

²⁰⁶ 3.1.100

²⁰⁷ 3.1.92

²⁰⁸ 3.1.102

accepted by the Christian community that will unfailingly recall her ancestry and denounce her for it. Launcelot jokes (his jokes often have a bitter seriousness at their core) that Jessica's one chance for Christian salvation is to "hope that your father got you not, that you are not the Jew's daughter."²¹⁰ This would make her, however, a morally corrupt bastard who cannot be trusted. Jessica cannot win in either case. If she is a legitimate heiress, she is a Jew who cannot be converted and is therefore undesired by Christian society. Early modern rhetoric suggests a Jew will always be a Jew, even if they have they have converted in public and live as a Christian. Adelman reminds us that Jessica has "converted religiously but can never convert her blood";²¹¹ she will always be an alien element. On the other hand, if she is not a Jew and can live an authentically Christian life, she is illegitimate, untrustworthy, and unacceptable to the respectable Christians who she hopes to live amongst.

Jessica and the Christians

The Christians do not bombard Jessica with solemn condemnations of her past or finger-wagging lessons about Christian virtue; instead, they mock, humiliate or ignore her. She is made the butt of Launcelot's jokes, for instance. He needles her and insistently points out that she will never quite belong; he claims that Lorenzo did wrong to marry and convert Jessica, because Christian society had members "enow before, in as many as could well live one by another."²¹² This set-up leads into a punch line about pork prices: the value of pigs will rise because of demand from converted Jews who would have rejected it before. His ultimate point, of course, is that Jessica is

²⁰⁹ 3.1.103

²¹⁰ 3.5.8-9

²¹¹ *Blood Relations* 75

unwanted, inconvenient and disruptive to the system that has been getting along so well without her. Jessica is visibly upset about this joke, as Lorenzo alludes to when he asks her “How cheer’st thou, Jessica?”²¹³ Her husband, instead of consoling her, asks her what she thinks of Portia. The implication is that Jessica is at such an insignificant place on the social ladder that simply talking about Portia, so clearly her superior, will make her feel better. Jessica begins to praise Portia’s divine qualities, which she calls “Past all expressing.”²¹⁴ She opines that Portia is such a perfect woman that if Bassanio were to mistreat or cheat her “he should never come to heaven.”²¹⁵ Lorenzo uses similar language earlier in the play to describe Jessica, but the end result is very different. This is not exactly the loving praise that he applies to Portia. He states that if “e’er the Jew her father come to heaven,/It will be for his gentle daughter’s sake.”²¹⁶ Shylock’s sole virtue is having fathered a daughter like Jessica, and that alone might be able to win him Christian salvation. This compliment certainly resembles Jessica’s praise of Portia at first; she is so wonderful that simply interacting with her might bring about spiritual redemption. Lorenzo’s admiration is undercut, however, by what he says next. He hopes that, as far as Jessica is concerned, “never dare misfortune cross her foot/Unless she do it under this excuse:/That she is issue to a faithless Jew.”²¹⁷ Lorenzo will not be able to blame misfortune if it comes down on Jessica’s head; she is, after all, a Jew, and she deserves what she gets. The difference between Jessica and Portia is obvious. Portia is a paragon who needs to be

²¹² 3.5.18

²¹³ 3.5.60

²¹⁴ 3.5.63

²¹⁵ 3.5.68

²¹⁶ 2.4.36-7

worshipfully respected, while Jessica is just good enough that her father does not seem completely worthless. It might be assumed that Lorenzo would not be rejected a place in heaven for mistreating or cheating Jessica – Jew that she is.

Jessica seems to be aware of this comparison between her and Portia. She presents the following scenario as she continues to praise Portia:

...if two gods should play some heavenly match
And on the wager lay two earthly women,
And Portia one, there must be something else
Pawned with the other, for the poor rude world
Hath not her fellow.²¹⁸

If Jessica and Portia were both placed on a scale, Portia would prove that she has inherent worth and that there is something special within her that even the gods would recognize. Jessica, on the other hand, must to be weighed down if she is going to have any value; her father's ducats are all that make her literally worthwhile. If she had not gilded herself, she might not even have been allowed on the scale. Portia appears to be so much Jessica's social and spiritual better that the thought of criticizing her would be unimaginable. The latter, even weighed down with ducats, can never compare. She is a coin that can be "pawned" and that only acquires value as it is exchanged and added to other coins. Portia is instead like a unique treasure, whole and complete in and of itself, needing no addition and nothing to make it seem valuable. Jessica does have some distinctive worth as a Christian convert, but she is never extolled as a soul won over to Christ; in fact, the other characters seem to be completely uninterested in this aspect of Jessica. If they mention her spiritual life, it is to refer to her Jewish past and her continued status as an "infidel." Jessica is something like a counterfeit coin;

²¹⁷ 2.4.38-40

she looks the part and has been given the right weight, markings and so on, but the Christian community has identified her as false and refuses to pass her in their economy. Portia, on the other hand, is immediately recognizable as an authentic piece, and she is the gold standard by which Jessica is found lacking. Lorenzo does not dissuade Jessica from thinking of herself as inferior to and less than Portia, reassuring her of her worth or validating her own identity as valuable. He instead claims that Jessica should be grateful to have married him, since he is as divine a man as Portia is a woman: “Even such a husband/Hast thou of me as she is for wife.”²¹⁹ Lorenzo is as genuine a coin as Portia, and it is through his influence and sponsorship that Jessica is able to register as a coin at all to the other Christians. If they see her as a forgery that they do not want to circulate, they can at least identify her as currency. This slender reward seems to be one of the few social benefits of Jessica’s conversion. These are problems that Portia (or at least the Portia of Jessica’s imagination) has never had to worry about; she is accepted by everyone she meets, and even her disguise at the end of the play passes flawlessly.

In their first interaction together, Portia reaffirms Jessica’s idea of herself as an inferior woman who is barely worth enough to be allowed in Portia’s presence. Their meeting begins soon after Bassanio solves the riddle of the three chests, when Lorenzo, Jessica and Salerio suddenly arrive in Belmont and bring Bassanio news of Antonio. When the three of them approach the newly-made couple, Bassanio leaves Jessica out of his greeting: “Lorenzo and Salerio, welcome hither...By your leave,/I

²¹⁸ 3.5.69-73

²¹⁹ 3.5.74-5

bid my friends and countrymen,/Sweet Portia, welcome.”²²⁰ Portia responds that the two men are “entirely welcome”²²¹ in Belmont, but does not extend the same sentiment to Jessica, who is left conspicuously unacknowledged. Jessica is neither Bassanio’s friend nor his countryman, and is not granted the privilege of recognition. Later in the scene, Jessica makes a bid at being accepted into this exclusive group. She offers information about her father’s plans for Antonio, claiming she has overheard how far his resentment is prepared to take him:

When I was with him I have heard him swear
To Tubal and to Chus, his countrymen,
That he would rather have Antonio’s flesh
Than twenty times the value of the sum
That he did owe him; and I know, my lord,
If law, authority, and power deny not,
It will go hard with poor Antonio.²²²

If there is some truth to the scene that Jessica narrates (which is entirely possible given Shylock’s similar rhetoric elsewhere in the play), it is undercut by her attempt to curry favor with this group that is disposed against her. Adelman finds that this is an overly obvious plea to win the hearts and minds of the Christians,²²³ and Ephraim sees her tale of scheming Jews as too “lurid”²²⁴ to have any real credibility. Portia and the other Christian characters must feel the same way, because they ignore what she has said. Once Jessica has finished, Portia turns to Bassanio and asks to hear more about his friendship with Antonio. Jessica’s little speech is her only dialogue in this scene; it comes unprompted and is paid no mind. Her thoughts are not chastised, but are also

²²⁰ 3.2.224-8

²²¹ 3.2.229

²²² 3.2.292-8

²²³ *Blood Relations* 74

²²⁴ “Jephthah’s Kin” 87

not given any heed. Not even her husband supports or at least responds to her. Portia is too bright a light, and she overshadows Jessica completely; all attention is directed to her. If Jessica had begun her life as a Christian, she might be merely uninteresting when compared to the wildly lauded Portia, but as a former Jew, a thief and a possible bastard, Jessica is actively excluded and rejected. It is clear that if Jessica were interested in a life of comfort and acceptance, she should ironically have remained a Jew; though she would be ostracized by the Christians, her own community would have given her an identity. In her current situation, she finds no acceptance from either side of the social and religious divide, and is left continuously adrift both personally and spiritually.

Jessica's Pleasures

Jessica has ultimately designed this situation herself and is responsible for the position she finds herself in. She has made her bed, and now must lie in it. The question is whether she sees this as undesirable. I submit that Jessica's sculpting of the scenarios that lead to her situation is vitally connected to the experience of pleasure. This pleasure is based on disgrace, shame, and presenting oneself as an outsider and social reject. The way she organizes her elopement, her treatment of her father and his subsequent mental breakdown, her awkward relationship with her husband and the Venetians, her tortured connections with both Judaism and Christianity – all of these aspects of her life can be seen as pleasurable if we understand them as part of a masochistic narrative. There is a moment during Jessica's elopement that is perhaps a paradigmatic example of how these pleasures operate. Jessica escapes from her house dressed as a boy so that she will not be identified by anyone, but she feels embarrassed

that Lorenzo and his friends will see her in this disguise. She looks down from the window and says:

Jess.: I am glad 'tis night – you do not look on me –
For I am much ashamed of my exchange...

Lor.: Descend, for you must be my torchbearer.

Jess.: What? Must I hold a candle to my shames?²²⁵

Jessica asserts that she is “ashamed” to be seen in her current state (whether because she is in the middle of stealing her father’s ducats or because she is dressed as a boy), and tells Lorenzo that she is “glad” he is not able to see her. Lorenzo’s immediate response is that Jessica will bear a torch for him, exposing her to everyone and bringing her feelings of shame out into the open. Jessica seems to react with surprise, but she soon after offers her infamous lines about gilding herself with more ducats and says that she will be with him right away. This moment fits perfectly into a masochistic narrative: Jessica claims that something will make her uncomfortable, her partner demands that she do it, and she not only complies but goes above and beyond by covering herself in coins and inviting even more ignominy. Now she will not only be seen as a scandalously cross-dressing thief, but she will wear the stolen objects all over her body. Her response to Lorenzo’s humiliating demand is to actively exaggerate it by adding her own props to it. She has not necessarily directed Lorenzo to ignore her anxious reservations (unless he has an extraordinary sensitivity to his wife’s masochistic interests), but the fact that he has done so becomes a vital centerpiece to the masochistic scenario she has arranged. In the rest of this section, I will detail how these pleasures work and what rules they abide by.

It is of first importance to note that masochistic pleasures assign worth and value in a very different way than a traditional economy of money or emotions. When Jessica escapes from her home, she throws a casket full of ducats down to Lorenzo and tells him that “It is worth the pains.”²²⁶ What is worth what in her statement? Does she mean that the pain of being a humiliated outcast is worth the price of the ducats? In an older article on the play, Camille Slights complains that scholars have been overly critical of Jessica, and are unfair to call her mercenary or criminal.²²⁷ Slights finds that Jessica’s elopement with Lorenzo is honestly about her true love for the Christian, and her theft of the ducats is an attempt to finance their life together. She has not stolen the money for personal gain but to help support her and her husband, since he has little money himself; thus, Slights determines that Jessica’s “willingness to marry a man without means, in fact, demonstrates relatively little concern with wealth”²²⁸ and the authenticity of her feelings. If I do not agree with the content of Slights’ argument, I think that her basic point is right in a roundabout way; Jessica’s interest is not really in the money at all, or at least not in the money in and of itself. This does not mean, of course, that she does not steal the ducats for personal gain. It is simply that the ducats themselves are not where that gain comes from. Their monetary value is effaced and they are given a different kind of “worth” as props in Jessica’s *mise en scene*. She gains pleasure not *from* the ducats, but *through* them; the ducats are a vehicle to bring her pain, which is what has real value. The “pains” she refers to

²²⁵ 2.6.35-42

²²⁶ 2.6.34

²²⁷ “In Defense of Jessica: The Runaway Daughter in *The Merchant of Venice*.” Shakespeare Quarterly 31.3 (1980) 357

²²⁸ Ibid. 361

are the pains of leaving her community and entering a circle of strangers, the pains of sacrificing the easy stability of lineage and family history, and the pains of betraying her father. The “it” she refers to is the masochistic pleasure she gains from those pains. The ducats are useful as intermediaries; they are objects she knows it will pain her father to lose, which will in turn cause her shame and dishonor. They allow Lorenzo to mock her as an “unthrift”²²⁹ thief and her father to wish her dead, her former community to see her as a fallen woman and her new community to see her as untrustworthy and criminal. In this sense, the ducats are certainly valuable and carry a great deal of weight, but this has nothing to do with the worth assigned to them in any external economy. Jessica repurposes her father’s ducats as coordinates in her masochistic fantasy, ignoring their “official” value and recasting them as theatrical props in an unofficial, personal economic system.

Jessica's masochistic pleasures are grounded in the structure of contracts, which inform so many relationships in the play. Jessica breaks a tacit contract with her father and community, a contract based on heritage and tradition, and enters into a more explicit contract defined by marriage and baptism. Pleasure seems to be impossible, at least in this play, without being connected to a contractual obligation. Jessica, then, is not so far removed from Portia, who also finds pleasure in contractual thinking and in the idea of exchanging herself. She weds Bassanio and seems to give up her wealth and property, but consistently reminds him that she is entering into a contract with him. Portia’s ring is only loaned to Bassanio: he must fulfill certain

²²⁹ 5.1.20

conditions of the marriage contract if he is to keep it.²³⁰ Portia is a moneylender who has made an investment. Her deference to her husband's wishes, her paying off his debts and helping Antonio, is her way of managing and protecting the "loan" that she has made.²³¹ The pleasure of her marriage is predicated on a contract being signed and fulfilled. Jessica's pleasure has a similar configuration, but with an important difference; while, as Amanda Bailey notes, Portia "positions herself as a creditor rather than a prize to be handed over",²³² Jessica seeks out the experience of being made into a piece of property to be sold or traded. Portia owns Bassanio where Jessica is owned by Lorenzo, the latter willingly putting herself into a situation of contractual bondage. She more than permits this to happen: she organizes it, designing a narrative whereby her goods, social reputation, and spiritual life will be placed firmly in Lorenzo's hands. This fact is all the more striking when one finds that wives did *not* need to give up their property to their husbands, as the popular imagination about early modern England might believe. On the contrary, the courts upheld petitions by wives to protect their property against being taken over by their husbands.²³³ English audience members, so many of who were involved in litigation at some point in their lives, would not necessarily have seen Jessica as a mere woman without any property rights under the law. In an English context, Jessica would have the legal wherewithal to prevent Lorenzo from dipping into her funds, but she does not draw on these resources. The idea that there is an alternative to her situation might even be an

²³⁰ Korda, Natasha. "Dame Usury: Gender, Credit, and (Ac)counting in the Sonnets and *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.2 (2009) 141

²³¹ Ibid. 142

²³² "Shylock and the Slaves" 21

²³³ Korda 138

additional source of pleasure. It is ultimately the case that there is no fighting over the ducats and Jessica does not despair that she is being taken advantage of. Lorenzo does not take her money; she gives it to him, and in this way is in as much control of her pleasure and the financial condition associated with it as Portia is. She has no need for a trial because she has designed and bound herself to this contract on her own terms.

The contract Jessica has made with the Christian community permits her the use of anti-Semitic sadism – which becomes, in her case, uniquely masochistic. The citizens and government of Venice take a certain sadistic pleasure in their treatment of the city's Jews; they are insulted, spit on, segregated and politically manhandled. This anti-Semitic sadism is a special privilege of Venetian citizenship, which is of course predicated on belonging to Christianity. Jacques Lezra points out that Jews, by definition, cannot join in on this pastime; the objects of institutionalized cruelty must be restricted from participating in it themselves if it is going to have a pleasurable effect on those that perpetrate it.²³⁴ Jews can only join in when they themselves convert. They are then asked to enjoy the fact that their old self is dead and can be observed from afar as an object of ridicule. Lezra finds that conversion in the play “means learning to love one’s (legal) death. (Or one’s death as a member of a religion.)”²³⁵ The new self that emerges has earned the right to hate the former self, and should luxuriate in the separation that has occurred. If Shylock does not feel truly content at the end of the play, it might be because he cannot appreciate that what he is feeling is one of the rewards of conversion. The anti-Semitism he has been permitted does not hold any interest for him. Jessica, on the other hand, is perfectly situated to

take advantage of this newly available pleasure; it is exactly in line with the masochistic program that she has performed throughout the play. Jessica becomes a Christian and gains the right to anti-Semitism, which means that she can inform against her father and his colleagues, as I discussed earlier, and stand by in silent complicity as her former religion is denigrated and her father's name is dragged through the mud. This may seem like the sadism of the Christians, but it has a very different result in Jessica's hands. She will never register as a real convert to her insular and suspicious new countrymen, meaning that she is still a Jew in their eyes even when she gains the privileges of a Christian. When they denigrate and insult her old religion and father, there is always an implicit glance at Jessica herself. If Jessica participates in and helps to cultivate their anti-Semitism, she is contributing to a hatred and mockery that will ultimately be directed back at her. She is officially allowed to join in on the rites and pleasures of anti-Semitic sadism as a Venetian citizen and a member of the Christian community, but her participation is finally masochistic. Her fellow Christians are the walls of an anti-Semitic echo chamber that reflect back at her the cruelty she shows her father and the distaste that she expresses for her old religion.

The critics I cite in this chapter almost universally find that Jessica has been mistreated and abused by her husband and his Christian friends: Adelman finds that her behavior toward them is “absurdly self-denigrating”;²³⁶ Ephraim argues that she is made into a sort of curiosity piece to be constantly leered at and prodded, neither

²³⁴ “‘Want-Wit’ Discipline.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.2 (2010) 242

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ *Blood Relations* 76

Christian nor Jew, and thus is a site of cultural anxiety;²³⁷ and Lupton submits that she has lost so many connections to her father, her community and her former identity that “she appears to have lost the capacity even to measure what she has given up.”²³⁸ Their statements are certainly true, but they presuppose that Jessica is a submissive recipient of these effects and that she is at the mercy of the Christians and their desire to shame and belittle her. Masochism, however, is not about submissiveness in the traditional sense, but a carefully-plotted passivity that the masochist guides and controls. Metzger claims that, as Jessica banters with Lorenzo in their last scene together, it is possible to read her not as flirting and playful but bitterly regretting her decisions.²³⁹ What Metzger and other critics who have written about Jessica do not account for is the idea that bitter regret might itself be a form of play, and if flirtation isn’t exactly the right word for play based on bitterness and disgrace, it obviously carries a potent, deep-seated erotic charge. In appearing to relinquish control, Jessica is ultimately in full control. The irony is that while the particular tension of Jessica’s masochism comes from her inability to fit in with the Christian community, masochism is a governing principle of erotic life in Venice. Jessica fits in better than she may know. Her father is only able to muster an “I am content”²⁴⁰ when he is stripped of his identity and made a “homeless, rightless, de-covenanted refugee”,²⁴¹ but Jessica not only finds pleasure in this process – she invites it on herself. If the Christians of the play see Jews as theological enemies because, among other reasons,

²³⁷ “Jephthah’s Kin” 134

²³⁸ *Citizen-Saints* 76

²³⁹ ““Now by My Hood”” 59

²⁴⁰ 4.1.405

²⁴¹ Adelman 98

of their “failure to master the flesh”²⁴² and control their sexual behavior and desires, in this sense Jessica is not an enemy at all and not so alien to them. She is rather like Antonio; both bind themselves into contracts that lead to constraint and hardship but also produce the singular pleasures of shame and being brought to the brink of spiritual and physical ruin. Antonio and Jessica have placed themselves into these situations, and if they are not always in control of what happens to them, it is a control they have given up for a different kind of benefit. Jessica is Christian at heart – if not spiritually or culturally, then in the way that she has designed and scripted her erotic life.

I feel that one of the most convincing proofs for the reading that I am proposing is that Jessica is not actually treated with disdain by all of the members of her husband’s community. The critics I have referred to tend to regard Jessica’s loneliness and outsider status as a totalized effect that informs every interaction she has in the play. This is not, however, entirely true. These critics pin much of their attention on Jessica’s relationship with Portia, which I detailed earlier; Jessica sees herself as completely inferior to Portia, and she can only relate to her in wildly embarrassing praise. Portia, for her part, ignores or sneers at Jessica. This characterization of Jessica and Portia is certainly apt, but I want to reiterate that because Jessica has designed the emotional and aesthetic *mise en scene* of her encounters with Portia, the latter might not be as interested in degrading and shaming Jessica as she wants her to be. Jessica’s masochistic script exaggerates her distance from Portia and places her in a pleasurably uncomfortable, humiliating situation.

²⁴² Anidjar 109

Portia is not necessarily a willing or conscious participant in these scenarios, and so they do not always go as a masochist might have planned. For instance, when Portia leaves Belmont to help rescue Antonio, she entrusts her estate and servants to Lorenzo and Jessica:

Lor.: Madam, with all my heart
I shall obey you in all fair commands.

Por.: My people do already know my mind,
And will acknowledge you and Jessica
In place of Lord Bassanio and myself.²⁴³

Portia is willing to have Jessica take her place, and even for her servants to treat Jessica just as they would their mistress. If Portia ever looked down on Jessica, she is – at least in this case – prepared to see her as her equal. When Jessica hears Portia’s decree, she offers her a humble blessing: “I wish your ladyship all heart’s content.”²⁴⁴ Despite what critics have said about Portia’s treatment of Jessica, her response is kind, gentle and friendly – “I thank you for your wish, and am well pleased/To wish it back on you. Fare you well, Jessica!”²⁴⁵ This has none of the haughty contempt that so many critics find in Portia’s behavior toward Jessica, unless a theater company wanted to stage the scene as venomous and sarcastic. I instead see this exchange as evidence that Jessica might not actually be the outcast that she has cast herself as, alone in an alien world and compelled to grovel at the feet of a gloriously divine Christian woman like Portia. Scholars have been quick to identify and corroborate her masochistic narrative, and consistently point out that Portia either ignores or humiliates Jessica, but I have not read a single argument that mentions this scene between the two women.

²⁴³ 3.4.36-40

²⁴⁴ 3.4.43

Critics, it would seem, are so caught up in her story that they have not paused to consider its artificial, constructed nature – they take it at face value. This may be because there is such a large disconnect between what the play seems to present in these scenes and what it has also shown Jessica creating for herself. She is isolated, alienated and humiliated, but she has directed and cultivated these feelings.

Helena has a vital line of dialogue that addresses this issue: “I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too.”²⁴⁶ Jessica and Helena do experience pain and shame, and the humiliation that they suffer is not merely an erotic game without any real consequences. However, at the same time, they “affect” this pain and shame, turning it into something else, using it as fuel for a masochistic project and recontextualizing it as a source of pleasure. The same is true if we flip the formula. They affect the pain they experience – designing it, manicuring it, managing it – but the fact they have created it themselves does not mean that they are unharmed by it or immune to its effects. If we call a character a masochist, we are not making light of her oppression or claiming that it is not oppression after all. It also does not mean that we are trying to invalidate the feelings of those who have been oppressed, suppressed and ostracized, or attempting to claim that people who experience these hardships all secretly enjoy what has happened to them. I feel that these are the reasons that taking pleasure in masochism has been so hard for some critics to discuss. They are afraid of saying the wrong thing, of being offensive, of making a statement that might be perceived as anti-feminist, hegemonic or simply insensitive. These concerns are absolutely understandable, but they also block scholars from seriously considering how

²⁴⁵ 3.4.44-5

characters might enjoy the experience of pain and how they might arrange it for themselves. Helena and Jessica both design and direct humiliating, harsh situations where they will be made the subject of mocking gossip, ostracized by society, condemned by their religions, and regarded with disdain by the people they love. While it is never explicitly stated that they take pleasure in these situations, I have tried to explore that possibility in this chapter, and to take seriously the idea of masochistic pleasure.

²⁴⁶ 1.1.42

CHAPTER II

Bondage, the public marketplace, and Antonio's body as a commodity in *The Merchant of Venice*

In the first chapter, I discussed how Jessica might find pleasure in the cruel or at least discomforting treatment she receives from the Christian community. In this chapter, I will detail the specifically theatrical nature of these pleasures; why is it that the early modern theater seems to enable or encourage the writing of characters who take pleasure in shame, humiliation and pain? Is there something inherently masochistic about the experience of performance? What other public forums might the stage resemble, and how might this contribute to its effect? I will continue to use *The Merchant of Venice* as my dramatic test case, but I will now turn my focus to Antonio's predicament, the way he organizes it, and the way his feelings are dramatized. I will argue, like many critics do, that Antonio is depicted as receiving a particular pleasure from the threat of Shylock's bond: he is able to play a martyr, publically submitting himself to the embarrassment of emasculation and the danger of a legally-mandated torture session. He can show Bassanio what a devoted and loving friend he is, and prove the righteousness of his hate for Shylock. The community will watch him undergoing this trial: they will witness him going beneath the knife and at the mercy of a fiendish, reviled moneylender. Drew Daniel sharply sums up Antonio's desires by claiming that, while he begins the play in a state of melancholic introspection, this interest in knowing himself and being "known by others quickly modulates into a desire to be seen and to be seen suffering physical pain."²⁴⁷ I agree

²⁴⁷ "'Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will': Melancholy Epistemology and Masochistic Fantasy in *The Merchant of Venice*." Shakespeare Quarterly 61.2 (2010) 216

with this reading of Antonio in many respects, and I want to add to it by stressing the pleasures that are involved in these desires. Daniel demonstrates that provocative ways that that legality and contractual thinking inform a masochistic experience, but his major focus is on the theoretical implications of this experience. I argue that is essential to extend these thoughts into the very personal eroticism that the play wants to explore, an eroticism that is theoretically-informed but also deeply individual and intimate. What personal erotic feelings are possible if the play brings together the court, contracts, and payment of a debt? How is theatricality related to a dispute over money, and how might their interaction contain a sexual charge for someone in their middle of it? How are these concepts able to make someone feel good? What is it about the theater that makes it so particularly primed to depict these pleasurable feelings?

Antonio's pleasure differs from Jessica and Helena's in two important ways. He also feels shame and humiliation, but his experience is much more public; he is put on display and practically exhibited in front of the leering Venetian courtroom and, by extension, the theater audience. He also faces actual danger and could very well die in the middle of Shylock's procedure. Antonio's erotic interests are clearly of a much different degree than Jessica or Helena's; his desires are profoundly physical and more literally painful. The trial scene offers an erotic portrait of a man taking his sexual feelings to their limit. He puts his life on the line for his desires, and we are asked to watch; at the same time, it is the fact that his life is on the line and people are watching that fuels his fantasy.

Due to its intensity and the public nature of Antonio's fantasies, the trial scene

might be called pornographic. Ian Moulton, however, asserts that while contemporary audiences perceive pornography as something that should be read or watched behind closed doors, early modern erotic stories and images were not necessarily thought of as private.²⁴⁸ There was a lengthy public tradition in the early modern period of erotic ballads, graffiti and plays, and people were accustomed to seeing erotic performances of one kind or another in the company of others. What if, this scene seems to suggest, an individual receives sexual fulfillment from the public nature of these scenes in addition to – or, perhaps, instead of and in place of – their ostensible, traditional erotic content?

The trial scene makes clear that both the theater and the court rely on this kind of pornographic theatricality. Like the court, the theater asks its audience to closely watch a person in a state of tense suspense, scrutinizing the character's behavior for evidence of guilt or a tragic ending, innocence or a comic resolution. The theater also draws on and recalls other arenas of legal spectacle like flogging, stockades and executions, which invite their audience to watch and learn (perhaps putting into perverse practice the Horatian interest in entertaining while educating) from scenes of shame, degradation, torture and death. While many scholars have convincingly argued that this relationship to the law and public punishment implicates the theater in a brutally repressive political system, I want to focus on the personal dimension of all this theatrical legality. What does it mean to invite the brutally repressive into one's sexual life, or to luxuriate in and receive pleasure from a brutally repressive situation? What does it mean to think of a government's oppression as an opportunity for play,

²⁴⁸ *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 14

personal enjoyment and erotic fulfillment? How do we reconcile the violence of the English judicial process with the idea that this very violence might be the focus of an individual's erotic life? How can we think of the scaffold as a pornographic stage? These events were exciting and compelling to thousands who gathered to see human beings being beaten, torn apart and killed; even if they were not sexually aroused by what they saw, their revulsion or fear was overcome by an intense titillation.²⁴⁹ This is an essential background for thinking about Antonio's erotic experience and how it is dramatized. I will begin this chapter by sketching the influence that the courts had on the theater, and how legal punishment was a vital element in staging a pornographic effect.

I will spend the last section of this chapter by discussing the market; I argue that its iconography has as much of an impact on Antonio's desires and how they are depicted as the theater or the court does. Antonio is like a commodity put on out display, haggled over by two parties who make very different bids for the right to claim him. Jessica also casts herself as an object to be bought and sold, but her relationship to the market is much more implied and hinted at from afar. Antonio, on the other hand, is a merchant himself, and has been made into one of his own goods; his body is a piece of property that can be sold off, not much different from a bag of spices or a case of wine. The scene also resembles an animal sale, with Antonio a cow or sheep that is put on stage, prodded and prepared to be sliced open. He is, of course, not an adequate specimen, but is more like, as he puts it, "a tainted wether of the

²⁴⁹ Owens, Margaret E. *Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005) 119

flock.”²⁵⁰ He is not even fit to be butchered, and this fact ironically adds to the shame of being put up for sale in the first place. Antonio is nevertheless able to find erotic meaning in this situation, putting into practice Valerie Forman’s claim that debt, trade, the market and other “new economic practices required the English to reconceptualize loss itself as something productive.”²⁵¹ Antonio’s debt, along with the humiliation and danger that it brings, is transformed into a source of pleasure. I call his pleasure economic not only because of its connection to his debts and the contract that he has signed, but also because of how it treats sexual pleasure and erotic feelings as goods to be traded, exchanged and bargained with. This pleasure also demonstrates how the market continued to be understood in erotic terms during and beyond the early modern period; it would soon develop into one of the most significant metaphors for how people imagined their erotic life. My goal is not to claim that the market exerted an insidious control over sex lives in early modern England, but to argue that its contractual language made it ideal fodder for a sexual desire based on passivity, submission and control. I will conclude the chapter by showing how the concepts I have explored in these first two chapters are foundational for the latter parts of my project, which deal with wittols (or knowing cuckolds) and the relationship between the stage and the audience; both issues are grounded in the idea that there is a certain profit to experiencing pain or shame.

The Pornographic Theater

The English theater was an intense place. It crowded hundreds of strangers into

²⁵⁰ Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Leah S. Marcus (New York: Norton, 2006) 4.1.117

a relatively small space, and then bombarded them with sights and sounds: the heckling, the cries of salesmen, and the smell of other theatergoers must have been overwhelming. The audience also had to be aware of pickpockets and con artists who trolled through the crowd looking for marks. There was then the small matter of a play to watch and pay some attention to. The situation was primed to bring sensations to their highest point. When antitheatricalist tracts claimed that theater audiences would be led into wantonness, prostitution, blasphemy and other immoral acts, they might have been on the right track; the atmosphere of the theater heightened the senses and intensified feelings, inviting the sort of decadent, lustful behavior that the tracts condemned. What antitheatricalists most complained about was the fact that, because of the theater's overwhelming environment, people acted against their better natures and did not really realize how they were feeling or what they were doing; Ellen McKay's research has shown the ways that these writers bitterly (but perhaps insightfully) argued that the theater's greatest threat was in its "skill at baffling our powers of discernment."²⁵² They could not agree on exactly what the theater would inspire its audience to do or where it would lead them, but antitheatricalists were certain that it aroused all sorts of sexual desire: for men, for women, for one's wife, for prostitutes, for boys, for girls, for actors. Even the theater's most ardent defenders recognized how affecting a theatrical experience could be: they admitted in their own tracts that the theater assaulted its audience with sensory spectacle and infected them

²⁵¹ *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 1

²⁵² *Persecution, Plague & Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 92

like the plague.²⁵³ It seems that there was nothing easy or safe about this performance space: it was a hotbed of emotions, feelings and anxieties, wildly contested but also very attractive to audiences who paid for exactly this sort of volatile experience.

The theater seems to have cultivated this experience and made it a selling point. It knew what its audiences wanted, and it offered an environment of lurid creativity where these expectations could be met. Early modern scholars often divide these audiences into small, unique groups: the poor, the rich, groundlings, patrons, those who sat on the stage, those who saw the theater as an alternative to bearbaiting, etc. Their point is usually that the theater had to cater to an incredibly diverse group of people, appealing to some at this moment and others at the next. I would argue, however, that the exciting, salacious, and controversial setting of the theater had a broad appeal to many different types of people, and might not have had to constantly alter its content and tone. Jeremy Lopez asserts, for instance, that it may be beside the point to insist on dividing up early modern audiences into discrete sections; these plays aimed at providing a broadly appealing experience that would hook as many viewers as possible.²⁵⁴ If the theater knew what its audience wanted and conducted itself accordingly, the audience was just as aware that they were getting what they wanted. Lopez claims that an attitude of self-consciousness linked the theater and its audience,²⁵⁵ with each side always aware of what the other was trying to do. The plays that emerged from this environment tended to push the envelope more and more throughout the seventeenth century, seeing what they could get away with and testing

²⁵³ Ibid. 85

²⁵⁴ *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern English Drama*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 18

the waters of how far audiences might want to go. Their death scenes, especially depictions of executions, became more imaginative and graphic; they lingered on taboo subjects like incest, and even tried to make incest something palatable and sympathetic; and there are very few tragedies from the early seventeenth century that do not involve rape or scenes of sexual violence. While some theatergoers may very well have been disturbed by these plays, it is unlikely that they were incredibly shocked or surprised; if drama was becoming increasingly violent, manic and garish, this is exactly what audiences paid for.

Critics have often connected the intense violence of these plays to the spectacle of public executions; they assert that the theater appropriated the energy and imagery of the scaffold for its own use. They argue that these plays, staging scenes that are so similar to official torture, unintentionally reflect and validate the strategies of government power. This reading was a central conceit of New Historicism, and has now become a critical commonplace. I agree that there is some truth to this insight, but I want to push it in another direction for a number of important reasons. First of all, Lorna Hutson has cautioned against investing too much in this reading. She points out that these critics have been heavily influenced by Foucault's writings about the 'spectacle of the scaffold' and the theatrical nature of official power; while Foucault is incredibly helpful and enlightening, his comments about the scaffold are specifically about France and not England or anywhere else in early modern Europe.²⁵⁶ It is irresponsible to transpose one context to the other for the sake of a good theory. It may

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 2

²⁵⁶ "Rethinking the 'Spectacle of the Scaffold': Juridical Epistemologies and English Revenge Tragedy." *Representations* 89.1 (2005) 34

also be true that executions have not so much influenced the theater as each has had an influence on the other; executions may have been just as inspired by the theater as the other way around. Margaret Owens suggests, for instance, that public executions and the plays that staged them were so indebted to one another that it is difficult to know exactly where the imagery and drama of the scaffold originated.²⁵⁷ Francis Barker offers what is perhaps the harshest critique of New Historicists when he states that constantly harping on the theatricality of public executions (or the political significance of theatrical executions) threatens to turn the torture and execution of thousands of real people into nothing more than a toothless aesthetic exercise.²⁵⁸ I present these alternate perspectives not because I want to discredit the idea that the theater and public executions were intimately linked – on the contrary, it is an important part of my argument – but to propose that insisting on public executions as the inspiration behind theatrical violence might be on the wrong track (or, at the least, a critical dead-end). I do not think that focusing so intensely on public executions allows us to account for the pornographic qualities that I will tease out of these plays; so, while executions are certainly vital to the theatrical violence I am writing about, I want to locate that violence's origin in a different and more immediately erotic sort of legal spectacle.

I am interested in public punishments that are more grounded in humiliation and shame than unbearable torture and death: thieves in the stocks, prostitutes carted through town, criminals flogged or whipped in the square. I argue that these publish

²⁵⁷ *Stages of Dismemberment* 121

²⁵⁸ *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 201

punishments are where the early modern theater learned how to produce a pornographic effect, and where audiences developed the tools for watching erotic dramas. Public whipping was a sentence that was broadly applied to many different crimes, and as such was an extremely common occurrence in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century;²⁵⁹ it was an event that anyone could easily have stumbled upon during a chance walk to the market. Criminals were often stripped naked for their flogging, in order to shame them in the eyes of their friends and neighbors. Sarah Toulalan notes that, because this was such a common sight, the public became comfortable with “watching the whipping of naked flesh and possibly enjoying the spectacle too.”²⁶⁰ Flogging gained even more erotic meaning because it was often used to punish sexual crimes like rape, adultery, prostitution and forcing servants into sodomy. The criminal’s body was almost overcharged with sexual tension, and the circumstances of public punishment were designed to excite and titillate as much as they were intended to teach viewers a social lesson. Onlookers were not expected passively to watch these punishments, but were encouraged to join in; when a criminal was locked up in stocks, viewers were expected to shout insults, throw stones and even urinate on the helpless prisoner. This exchange between the criminal and the viewer was so intensely physical and emotional that it took on a potently erotic character. It was also, of course, a deeply theatrical experience. Jeremy Lopez states that, for defenders of the theater like Thomas Heywood, an “ideal performance is one where there is a sense of physical and emotional connection between audience and

²⁵⁹ *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 114

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 116

actor.”²⁶¹ The spectacle of public punishment is then, in some ways, even more theatrical than the theater itself; it intimately connects the person who is suffering and the person who is watching them suffer.

I argue that this experience and its pleasures are dramatized in the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*. Antonio is essentially put out on display like a criminal in the stocks, and is helplessly prone while the community ogles at and pities him. The deep sense of shame that results from this situation creates an erotic tension that also leads to a deep sense of pleasure. This pleasure is built on the fact that Bassanio, his intimate friend, watches him and realizes that Antonio is suffering for him; on the embarrassment of being emasculated by his powerless position in the court and feminized by the implied threat of castration; and on the way that he resembles an animal or set of goods being sold at the market and available to whoever makes the best case. I want to explore how these pleasures work and what they look like when put into practice, what feelings they evoke and how they recruit and rely on the presence of spectators. What building blocks is this pleasure made of, and what images, narratives and cultural locations are important to it? Is it something that we can identify, or will it always remain hidden in the person experiencing it? Antonio offers a compelling dramatic test case for these ideas, and his desires are emblematic of the approach that the early modern theater begins to take to staging sex and erotic feelings. I will begin my discussion of these issues by outlining the terms of Antonio’s desires: what do they look like, and where we can find them?

Scholars of *The Merchant of Venice* continue to debate how Antonio desires or

²⁶¹ *Theatrical Convention* 32

whether he even desires at all. Is he a gay man? Is he neither straight nor gay, but merely a typical early modern person who cannot be anachronistically placed into one of these categories? Is his relationship with Bassanio only intimately homosocial or has their friendship been sexually consummated? James O'Rourke, while arguing that Antonio is an early example of a dramatized gay identity, claims that the play offers "no suggestion that Antonio has an active sex life."²⁶² These critics mirror Antonio's friends Salarino and Salanio, who try to figure out what makes Antonio so "sad"²⁶³ and wonder whether it is love or anxiety over his ships being lost at sea. I want to argue, however, that Antonio's desires are hidden in plain sight and have always been available (if we consider the play from a certain perspective). I am not going to make any claims about whether Antonio is "gay" or not, but will thoroughly consider his sexual life and its pleasures – I feel that these are two different questions, and I am more interested in the latter. Antonio's desires are based in being restrained, made helpless, humiliated and indebted to such a degree that he cannot pay back those debts without suffering pain or even giving up his life. The subjection that he suffers in the trial scene seems to come from outside, but he has chosen this situation himself; much like Jessica, he designs the *mise en scene* of a dramatic scenario that is conducive to embarrassment, entrapment and vulnerability. This *mise en scene* is predicated on the idea that Antonio has *not* designed it at all and that he is at the mercy of the court; Janet Adelman finds that the play conceals a mysterious "desire that Antonio cannot know or allow others to know, projecting it outward as though it had nothing to do

²⁶² "Racism and Homophobia in *The Merchant of Venice*." *ELH* 70.2 (2003) 391

²⁶³ 1.1.1

with him.”²⁶⁴ If we pay close attention to Antonio’s language throughout the play, we will see that what he wants from the trial scene and how he wants it are actually not so ambiguous.

Antonio and Bassanio

Antonio’s bond leads to a scenario in which he will be bound and helpless in front of Bassanio. When Bassanio comes to Antonio and asks for his help in raising money, Antonio instantly assures him that “My purse, my person, my extremest means/Lie all unlocked to your occasions.”²⁶⁵ Everything that Antonio has, including his body, is open for Bassanio to use as he sees fit. Antonio’s language here already evokes pain and torture; he claims that his credit “shall be racked even to the uttermost”²⁶⁶ so he can raise the funds that Bassanio needs. The idea that credit could be racked and stretched out in pain has its roots in an early modern tradition; Amanda Bailey has deeply researched this tradition, and has uncovered many instances in which debt bonds were depicted as tools of torture.²⁶⁷ The debtor was even imagined as signing a bond with his own blood, making his body into an official part of the contract.²⁶⁸ If debtors forfeited a debt, they could, in fact, be held physically responsible; the early modern period saw the popularization of debtor’s prisons where creditors were allowed to place borrowers who were unable to pay off their debts. Popular rhetoric equated a person who forfeited their debts with a slave: both gave up their body to an owner who could do with them what he wanted (whether put to work

²⁶⁴ *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 117

²⁶⁵ 1.1.141-2

²⁶⁶ 1.1.184

in the slave's case or thrown in jail in the debtor's case).²⁶⁹ The dangers of being in debt became even more prominent when borrowing for someone else; you became liable for another's misadventures and what Walter Lim calls "the controlling particularities of somebody else's financial situation."²⁷⁰ You took on these risks without the security that the person you were borrowing for would or could pay you back.

Antonio borrows money for Bassanio's needs, which means that Bassanio will be able to travel to Belmont and woo Portia. If, however, Antonio's ships fall through, his friend has no way to pay him back, and Antonio will face hounding creditors and the possibility of debtor's prison. Antonio puts himself in real danger for Bassanio's sake, running the risk of ruining his credit and being imprisoned. Antonio will thus be able to demonstrate to Bassanio the depths of his friendship and devotion. When he puts himself in debt for Bassanio, his sometimes fickle, cavalier friend becomes indebted to *him* in a spiritual and emotional sense. Jill Philips Ingram claims that this was an early modern commonplace: being the "creditor in the emotional balance sheet" shared between friends "creates a beloved debtor."²⁷¹ Antonio does run a number of risks by going into debt for Bassanio, but it will create a significant emotional payoff by deepening their friendship. If this benefits Bassanio in the end – if he is successful in his quest and becomes engaged to Portia – this is almost irrelevant

²⁶⁷ "Shylock and the Slaves: Owing and Owning in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.1 (2011) 16

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 12

²⁷⁰ "Surety and Spiritual Commercialism in *The Merchant of Venice*." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 50.2 (2010) 371

²⁷¹ *Idioms of Self-Interest: Credit, Identity, and Property in English Renaissance Literature*. (New York: Routledge, 2006) 101

to Antonio. What matters is that Antonio himself gains pleasure from his situation; Bassanio might or might not experience pleasure from his relationship with Portia, he might or might not even succeed in winning her hand, but he will know what Antonio has done and will witness the suffering that he undergoes.

The bond that Antonio signs does, of course, involve a much greater danger than just risking prison. Shylock and Antonio share a bitter history of distrust and contempt, and it is curious that Antonio would want to do business with Shylock in the first place. He is not surprised, certainly, when Shylock decides on the terms of their debt contract:

This kindness will I show:
Go with me to a notary; seal me there
Your single bond, and in merry sport,
If you repay me not on such a day
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.²⁷²

Shylock makes this proposal so spontaneously and Antonio accepts it so casually that it might not seem as bizarre and deranged as it really is. If Antonio is not able to come up with the full amount of money, a chunk of his body will be cut off, and Shylock himself will do the cutting. The play does not give an actor playing Antonio much time to hesitate or ponder over Shylock's offer; his response is so immediate and so affirmative that there is little space for disdain or sarcasm in the line delivery. Antonio instantly claims that he is "content"²⁷³ with this deal, and admits that Shylock has

²⁷² 1.3.142-50

²⁷³ 1.3.151

shown him “much kindness”²⁷⁴ by his proposal. If we consider the fact that Antonio has so many ships at sea and that the play opened with his friends expressing their anxiety over possible shipwrecks, he is not in the best position to make such a dangerous pact. He can also not expect that Shylock will actually think of their agreement as only a bit of “merry sport”, especially when he has been so causelessly nasty to this man. Shylock, before he states the bond’s terms, recollects to Antonio the “shames that you have stained me with;”²⁷⁵ Shylock reminds him of the times that he has spit on him, kicked him, and called him a “cutthroat dog” and “misbeliever.”²⁷⁶ Antonio does not apologize but assures Shylock that he will someday spit on him again, call him names again, and spurn him again. Shylock may claim that his interest in cutting Antonio’s flesh is a joke and merely his attempt to “be friends with you and have your love”,²⁷⁷ but the acidic scorn that connects these two characters simply runs far too deep. Antonio could have gone to another one of the many Jewish moneylenders in Venice; we see Tubal, hear of Chus, and there are, one imagines, many others who would have loaned Antonio this money. Why has he chosen the one creditor that he has insulted, abused and humiliated? It is almost as if this is the very deal that Antonio hoped to make from the beginning; he has approached the lender who would give him the worst, most unfair terms, and has received what he must have expected. He has truly shown his friend how much he cares for him, putting his own body at the mercy of a man who has ample cause to hate him and is likely to relish the process of torturing him.

²⁷⁴ 1.3.152

²⁷⁵ 1.3.137

²⁷⁶ 1.3.109

Some scholars have seen Antonio's dangerous, self-abasing bond as a renouncing of his personal desires in favor of Bassanio's desires. He suffers so that Bassanio will be able to take pleasure. Henry S. Turner finds that "Antonio decides to sign the bond rather than to deny Bassanio, choosing love for his friend over love for himself."²⁷⁸ Turner also feels, however, that Antonio will not receive much in return; the fact that Bassanio allows Antonio to risk death shows that he is not really a friend at all, and proves that Antonio's drastic actions will not actually win Bassanio's affection.²⁷⁹ Antonio has ruined his credit and given up his body for no good reason. Steve Patterson complains about Antonio's bond too, arguing that his plan, to pledge "money and his own flesh for a gentleman who has given nothing in return, does not seem likely to earn a profit or produce domestic tranquility."²⁸⁰ These critics argue that Antonio does not get anything out of his situation and does not receive any profit from it (whether financial or emotional). I propose that Antonio is not relinquishing his own desires and pleasures; on the contrary, he is indulging them. This is exactly what he wants and what he arranges for himself. He is being used because he wants to be used, being tortured because it is the sensation of torture (and the feeling of people watching him being tortured) that gives him pleasure. If Bassanio is uncaring or mercenary in his relationship with Antonio, if he accepts the possibility that his friend will suffer because it benefits his wallet and will win him the girl he wants, this is all the better; Antonio's sacrifice falls on a deaf heart, exaggerating his suffering and

²⁷⁷ 1.3.136

²⁷⁸ "The Problem of the More-Than-One: Friendship, Calculation, and Political Association in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.4 (2006) 418

²⁷⁹ Ibid. 425

making it more pleasurable. Bassanio's behavior is actually conducive to Antonio's desires, and not an obstacle to them; he is being more of a friend by *not* caring about Antonio than if he worried over him and forbid him from accepting Shylock's bond. Antonio's decisions imply that this sort of emotional tension is vital to his pleasure: when you brutalize me, or especially when you allow me to be brutalized, you are doing exactly what I want.

Antonio's bond with Shylock has a much different valence than the agreement that he has made with Bassanio. The latter has been roped into watching Antonio suffer; he has been recruited to witness the pain and bondage that Antonio has to undergo. It is not important, however, that Shylock watches Antonio – what is essential is that he *acts* on Antonio and that others watch him acting. Shylock is not a witness, but an actor in Antonio's scheme. Shylock has not only agreed to lend Antonio the necessary money, but has also been cast as an actor in Antonio's narrative of imprisonment and mutilation. Antonio has insisted on making a deal with the one moneylender most likely to harm him because Shylock is the only one capable of playing the exact role that he requires: an uncompromising enemy who will relish the opportunity of making him suffer and who will be seen as an uncomfortable, alien threat to the citizens who are gathered at the trial.

Antonio and Shylock are further linked because the former is a masochist and the latter is a usurer. The idea of masochism is entirely self-serving: the "profits" of masochism go nowhere but to the masochist and do not benefit the economy. This was the same accusation made against usury – Walter Lim finds that lending money at

²⁸⁰ "The Bankruptcy of Homoerotic Amity in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50.1

interest was labeled a sort of “unnatural reproduction”²⁸¹ because it did nothing but produce more money. If money was not put to work by being used to buy goods, it was not “producing” anything new. It had to circulate and be converted into another form. The interest money made from usury did not come from anywhere new – it was produced by itself. This led to usury’s association with sodomy, which was also decried as self-serving, unnatural and unproductive.²⁸² The sodomite also makes nothing new and wastefully spends all of his reproductive powers on sinful pleasure. Tracts and pamphlets claimed that usury and sodomy were therefore sick and corrupt: they prevented the healthy flow of society, stymieing the circulation of money and the production of children.²⁸³

These tract writers could not, however, speak out against masochism; it was not yet a concrete discourse that could be railed against. Masochism was not technically defined until the late nineteenth century, when Krafft-Ebbing wrote about it in his influential *Psychopathia Sexualis*. If we take into account early modern theories of usury and sodomy, however, we can easily speculate about the charges that tract writers would have made against masochism. These practices, much like usury and sodomy, have also been conceptualized as unproductive and selfish, and would similarly have been called unhealthy and corrupt. I argue that this is, at least, the case in *Merchant of Venice*; the play’s conception of masochism is inspired by the way that usury and sodomy have already been vilified. Antonio’s monologues are colored by a

(1999) 16

²⁸¹ “Surety and Spiritual Commercialism”

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Harris, Jonathan Gil. *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare’s England*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 53

“language of pathological contamination”,²⁸⁴ and it is clear that he considers himself sick. He calls himself a “tainted wether of the flock”,²⁸⁵ a sheep that is sickly and castrated, of no use to anyone and even actively dangerous to the community. He must be culled so that he does not contaminate other, healthier sheep. Antonio claims to be diseased produce; he is the “weakest kind of fruit”,²⁸⁶ an unripe, unnecessary and undesirable good that no one would want to purchase. Antonio associates his feelings with sickness and corruption, just as if he were accusing himself of being a sodomite or a usurer. The important difference is that while someone accused of sodomy might feel ashamed of such accusations, a masochist actually cultivates and acts out these shameful charges.

This may be one of the reasons that it is difficult for Portia to tell Antonio and Shylock apart when she enters the courtroom; one of her first statements is, “Which is the merchant here and which the Jew?”²⁸⁷ Shylock should, however, be fairly easy to identify; Portia would know he was Jewish because of his “gabardine”²⁸⁸ and, we can assume, the long beard and fox-hemmed hat that traditionally accompanied it. How is it that Antonio could be mistaken for a Jew? He has not even spoken yet, and has revealed nothing about himself or who he is. There is, then, something about his self-presentation that makes him indistinguishable from anti-Semitic images of sickly and effeminate Jews. Antonio, like Shylock, is tainted by the idea of sickness and corruption; the latter because he is a Jew and a usurer, and the former because he is an

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 77

²⁸⁵ 4.1.116

²⁸⁶ 4.1.117

²⁸⁷ 4.1.175

²⁸⁸ 1.3.7

implied sodomite and masochist. James O'Rourke finds that Antonio is internally conflicted because his desires are at odds with traditional Christian values of productive sexuality; his treatment of Shylock is therefore a projected self-loathing.²⁸⁹

I argue that what the play depicts, just beneath the surface, is the exact inverse: Antonio does not project his self-loathing onto Shylock but takes many of its elements from him. Shylock is exactly the sort of hated, harried and pathetic figure that he wants to be. Antonio also wants to be despised, mocked and seen as a sickly, undesirable outcast.

Antonio's Masochism

Turner, Patterson and other scholars may be uncomfortable with my reading; they tend to see Antonio as a naïve older man who sacrifices all he has for a predatory hustler. I want to imagine that Antonio is in control of his own helplessness. If he is mistreated, I argue that this is the point of his erotic fantasy. If he relinquishes his body and seems to relinquish control of his free will, it is because giving up his body is an expression of a different kind of control and a different kind of freedom. If Bassanio appears exploitative and abusive, it is because Antonio has recruited him to perform this role. I agree with Drew Daniel in calling Antonio a masochist; he gives up control of himself and needs to be watched and observed giving up that control. He cannot simply torture himself in private, without anyone to watch or comment. Masochists need observers – giving up control loses its erotic meaning if there is not another person there to create a sense of structure and narration. Antonio requires Bassanio in all of his fickleness, shallowness and selfishness to witness what he is

²⁸⁹ "Racism and Homophobia" 380

going through and to show him just how useless his bid for affection will be. Bassanio has married Portia and left him behind, but Antonio will nevertheless be put under the knife for his friend's benefit as that friend watches on in confusion. If he does not have this audience and co-author (unwitting though Bassanio may be), the torture and shame that he puts himself through would lose their pleasurable tension. This is one of the essential ingredients of a masochistic experience: Daniel defines it as the "collaborative impulse"²⁹⁰ of masochism, and reminds us that a masochistic fantasy demands a cast of players who can participate by merely watching. He states that the trial scene is almost like a masochistic "ritual",²⁹¹ a sort of theatrical performance that requires an attentive audience. Antonio has placed himself in a position whereby Bassanio and Venice's citizens "are nearly forced to preside over his suffering and death in a gruesome spectacle."²⁹² This may horrify them and make them squirm in their seats, but it is exactly this sort of experience that a masochist thrives on.

Antonio, like the other masochists I discuss in this project, is responsible for his situation; he has signed on the dotted line and fully agreed to the exact experience that he has during the trial scene. His status as playwright is predicated, however, on constantly disavowing that he has had anything to do with the play he performs in. Jessica and especially Helena are slightly more open about the fact that they have designed the *mise en scene* of their masochistic scenarios. Antonio, on the other hand, is insistent about his helplessness and complete lack of agency. He tells Bassanio that this situation is really nobody's fault, and that Bassanio should certainly not blame

²⁹⁰ "Let me have judgment" 220

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid. 233

himself. Fortune is at fault:

Give me your hand, Bassanio, fare you well;
Grieve not that I am fall'n to this for you,
For herein Fortune shows herself more kind
Than is her custom...²⁹³

Antonio gives all the credit to Fortune and its whims, and does not acknowledge that he has had any part in what has occurred. He is its victim and is helpless to change what has happened; he is happy, at least, that he has been able to help Bassanio in the midst of his suffering. Antonio's disavowal is disingenuous: he is the one who went to Shylock, the very person who would want to do him harm and the last person he should have signed a debt contract with; he agreed to Shylock's conditions knowing full well how dangerous they were; and he repeatedly told Bassanio how prepared he was to suffer for his sake, suggesting that he has specially sought out the condition he finds himself in. The play is *explicit* about the fact that Antonio is an architect of his own distress. He denies this role because it allows him to present himself as a helpless lump of flesh, tossed and turned on the sea of life. He styles himself as someone who is feeble and powerless, dangled in the air and at the mercy of higher powers that he cannot understand. In Antonio's case, the pleasure of designing a masochistic scenario is made more powerful by the constant denial that he has had anything to do with it. Shylock is not a threat because he will cut a pound out of Antonio – this is what Antonio *wants*. He is a threat because he insists that Antonio is not a helpless victim; that he has signed a legal contract; and that he has placed himself in this scene with full knowledge of what would happen to him. If he talks too much, he might spoil one of the central premises of Antonio's masochistic fantasy.

Antonio's fantasy put him in the company of De Flores, the grotesque anti-hero of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*. Gabriel Rieger argues that De Flores, who loves the haughty Beatrice-Joanna, fantasizes about "being brutalized for the object of his desire and degraded, even beyond the point of servant."²⁹⁴ He wants to be cut apart and turned into her dancing shoes, to be impersonally and coldly used by her while he is quite "literally under her feet."²⁹⁵ He imagines himself as an object that has no say in what is happening to it. The fact that this is his fantasy means that he really *has* a say in having no say; the condition of having no choice is a choice that he has made. Antonio likewise wants his body to be turned into material that Bassanio can use and exploit. His bond with Shylock actually does De Flores one better, bringing this fantasy into reality. It allows his literal flesh and blood, a pound of it, to be used as the mortar that will pave the road beneath Bassanio's feet. He is like a cow brought to the slaughter, impotently mooing while he is chopped up for the use of his eventual devourer. De Flores quickly abandons his own version of this fantasy, and becomes a sadistic taskmaster who coerces Beatrice-Joanna into greater and greater moral corruption. Antonio, on the other hand, takes his fantasy and runs with it, putting it into practice by agreeing to a bond that will cut into his physical body. There is a direct relationship between Antonio's mangled pound of flesh and Bassanio's financial and marital success; the former has facilitated the latter. De Flores' fantasy is certainly attractive him. He gets a palpable erotic charge out of imagining himself as an inanimate object that Beatrice-Joanna can use, coolly enjoy, and dispose of when

²⁹³ 4.1.273-6

²⁹⁴ *Sex and Satiric Tragedy in Early Modern England: Penetrating Wit*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) 83

she sees fits. It is, however, a passing fancy, and he does not follow-up on it. In Antonio's case, this fantasy scenario is dramatized as the driving engine of his erotic life.

Antonio's fantasy evokes the iconography of Catholic martyrdom: he is a lamb brought to the slaughter in the name of a higher cause, willing to lay down his life so that his loved ones will not have to suffer. If we look closer, however, Antonio's situation is very different from that of a Catholic martyr; the way that he presents himself and the energy that he brings to his performance would most likely have exposed him as a pseudo-martyr. Brad Gregory and Sara Covington both offer a helpful history of this false martyrdom. Gregory finds that victims of religious persecution were often, it is true, very theatrical; they were melodramatic and flamboyant, and proudly flaunted their willingness to die.²⁹⁶ Covington expands on this Gregory's research and explains how martyrs saw themselves as imitating Christ and the early Christians, and were self-conscious about acting out and fully performing the drama of martyrdom.²⁹⁷ However, someone could not become a martyr simply by reciting the right lines and looking the part. If a supposed martyr did not die for truly religious views – if they died for the own glory, or out of stubbornness and pride – they were condemned as a “false martyr.”²⁹⁸ Luther criticized martyrs who suffered “for the sake of their own will” and for “self-indulgent spirituality;”²⁹⁹ he was disgusted by their selfishness and by the idea that they would co-opt the actual

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 136

²⁹⁷ *The Trail of Martyrdom: Persecution and Resistance in Sixteenth-Century England*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) 65

suffering of true believers for their own benefit. Luther and other Christian thinkers, to this end, adopted a maxim created by St. Cyprian and later developed by St. Augustine: “martyres verso non facit poena sed causa.”³⁰⁰ It is not the punishment, but the cause, that makes a martyr: if someone suffers and goes through all the steps of becoming a martyr, but does not actually die in the name of Christ and for the sanctity of their religious convictions, they are not a true martyr and they have deceived the community that watched them be tortured and executed. Antonio, a masochist who has created this narrative of martyrdom for his own erotic benefit, might himself have been labeled a false martyr. He appropriates the iconography and language of Christ for his own use and his own feelings; the torture he is threatened with may look like the sort of punishment that a martyr must face, but the cause that he undergoes this punishment for is completely personal. Antonio’s masochism delegitimizes him as an authentic martyr.

Drew Daniel’s article on the play is interested in the socio-political implications of what Antonio is going through (an emphasis shared by most early modern critics), and he discusses Antonio’s pleasures from a theoretical angle. His essay understands masochism as a theoretical function that is related to how a community is formed, how governments rule and how citizens are expected to think of themselves. Daniel argues that Antonio’s bond and his masochistic fantasy is a reaction to the strictness and oppressive rule of Venetian power; he claims that

²⁹⁸ Gregory 329

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 332

³⁰⁰ St. Cyprian’s *De unitate ecclesiae* and St. Augustine’s Letter 89.2. Cited in Dillon, Anne. *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002) 19

masochism plays with that strictness, counters it and subverts it, and that in this way it “threatens to rupture and discredit the civic bond”³⁰¹ of the Venetian community. These insights are sharp and enlightening, but I argue that we must also consider the role of Antonio’s personal pleasure in this situation. His masochistic narrative has definite political implications, but what the play shows is first and foremost a man who enjoys the experience of being tortured (or teetering on the verge of being tortured) while an audience watches him.

The erotic appeal of the play is in witnessing this scene play out, and to being an implicit part of it as an audience member. I agree that we must be attentive to the biopolitical consequences of these desires, but I want to concentrate on the personal pleasures that biopolitics make available. What does it mean to invite biopolitics into one’s life, into one’s bedroom? I do not want to argue that Antonio is being acted on by a monolithic biopolitical system, but that he understands and desires to be acted upon by these forces. The play, in other words, imagines a character who can act in a situation where he would normally be acted upon, and who is acted upon because of his actions. In the next section, I will discuss how Antonio’s body is feminized by the position that he puts himself in, and will discuss the pleasurable shame that results. I will then show how this feminization connects the trial scene to the early modern market: Antonio turns himself into a commodity to be displayed and sold to the highest bidder, a sort of coin that can be manhandled and traded. His body stops being his own and becomes an object to be exchanged. I will finally discuss how the confluence of shame and commodity is essential for understanding the subject of my

³⁰¹ Ibid.

next chapter: the wittol, who enjoys and profits from the knowledge that his wife is cheating on him.

The Feminized Body

Gail Kern Paster has argued that early modern rhetoric tended to see women as “leaky vessels”³⁰²: they are like cups that cannot hold all the liquid that they contain, and are constantly springing leaks and inadvertently letting that liquid flow out of them. They cannot help but let out streams of tears, urine, blood and other discharges. Men, on the other hand, are able to control these liquids; their ability to do so is a sign of masculinity, discipline and civility. The virtue of bodily control became more and more significant to early modern theories of decorum, and Paster demonstrates how philosophical texts, conduct manuals and plays claimed that women could not “be counted on to manage their behaviors in response to historically emergent demands of bodily self-rule.”³⁰³ These texts opine that women should feel ashamed and embarrassed about their leakages; they thus formed a sort of proto-theory of shame that grounded shameful feelings on an inability to control the body and its leaky fluids.³⁰⁴ Men could be affected by these leakages in their weaker moments; during sex, when drunk, while being flogged. The point was to bridle them as much as possible, maintaining self-control and not letting the public notice any slippages. If a man were to let his guard down by pissing his pants at the local tavern or not dressing a fresh wound, staining his clothes and leaking his bodily fluids all over the street, he

³⁰² *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 25

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 19

would be branded as feminine and ridiculous.³⁰⁵ This man has shown that he cannot control himself and does not know how to act like a man. In an early modern culture that was so obsessed with appearances and decorum, this was a decisive *faux pas*; women might be expected to leak, but a man should be able to master his bodily functions.

This is one of the central reasons for Antonio's shame. If his flesh is cut off, he will begin to leak blood all over the court like a menstruating woman. Paster calls him a "distinctly feminized victim",³⁰⁶ and is prone at any moment to having his fluids forcibly released; he will be cut open, helplessly exposing his innards in front of the community and showing that he does not have any manly self-control. He cannot control what his body does, and this incontinence is shamefully emasculating. Christian Billing claims that Antonio's potential injuries will cause him, like the women of early modern conduct manuals, to undergo an experience of "corporal instability."³⁰⁷ It is not simply that he will bleed or spread out his waste in public – it is that his inability to control his bodily functions speaks to a larger inability to control the limits of his body and to maintain the border that divides where he ends and others begin. If men are able to hold in their fluids and demonstrate to the public that they have a stable body, they will also be able to maintain a stable identity and be sure of themselves. If Antonio lets loose all the fluids inside him, it will be difficult to decide exactly where his personal boundaries lie, and his self-identity will become muddled. It may even be effaced; his inner life would be voided by his literal innards spilling

³⁰⁵ Calbi, Maurizio. *Approximate Bodies: Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 75

³⁰⁶ Paster 92

out on the courtroom floor. This was a problem that, according to conduct books, women faced all the time: their identities were in constant flux because they were constantly leaking. Paster finds that this made women unreliable and unable to be trusted;³⁰⁸ men were advised to not discuss weighty matters with women, because they could not know who they would be speaking to from one day to the next. Women were characterized as living in perpetual shame because of these failings, while men have the tools to keep their bodies steadfast and their identities stable. Antonio has arranged a scenario that will allow him to luxuriate in the shame of feminine instability, leaking out his blood, tears and monologues. This will cause him shame and paint him as unmanly, but that is not a bad thing – it is a foundational part of his masochistic pleasure. Antonio has entangled himself in an elaborate legal, economic and emotional situation so that he can experience the state of shame that was ascribed to early modern female experience.

Antonio is further feminized because he is placed in such a vulnerable and passive position. His body is completely at the mercy of the court, and Julia Lupton demonstrates how Antonio is constantly reminded of the “ability of his flesh to be pierced.”³⁰⁹ The court and the men who run it will decide how his body is treated, what it can do and how it can act. He stands in contrast to Portia and Shylock, who should ostensibly be the most feminine characters in the courtroom. Portia, however, dresses as a man, shows masculine initiative, and proves that she has an ingenious skill with legal rhetoric and logic. Shylock also defies femininity; even though Jessica

³⁰⁷ *Masculinity, Corporality and the English Stage 1580-1635*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008) 71

³⁰⁸ *Body Embarrassed* 25

stole his “stones” and Jewish men were often parodied as feminine, Lupton argues that Shylock is “a figure of fixation rather than fluidity.”³¹⁰ He knows what he wants and how he wants it, trusting in the solidity of his bond and the legality of his claim. Antonio, on the other hand, does not seem to have any initiative at all, and simply allows these events to happen to him. He admits that this is exactly how he wants to present himself to the court:

I do oppose
My patience to his fury, and am armed
To suffer with a quietness of spirit
The very tyranny and rage of his.³¹¹

Antonio makes clear that he is not going to raise a hand in his own defense; he will wait with “patience” while the court decides whether or not his body should be picked apart. It does not matter how much “tyranny and rage” is levied against him or how criminal and unjust Shylock’s bond might be: Antonio will “suffer” these events in patient silence. His passivity is, however, a calculated position, and what seems to be a “quietness of spirit” is an active performance and that continually insists it is being played. I am not trying to argue that this makes Antonio “masculine” instead of “feminine”, or attempting to prove that he is actually manly after all. I simply want to notice how the passive femininity he presents to the court is an active role that he has chosen and arranged. It is a role he has prepared for; he is “armed” with his helplessness, and will use his passive “quietness” to actively “oppose” Shylock’s aggressively vigorous behavior. If he looks and acts like an exposed and defenseless

³⁰⁹ *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

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³¹⁰ *Ibid.* 75

³¹¹ 4.1.11-4

woman who has no say in what happens to her, this requires just as active and committed a performance as Portia displays by playing Balthazar. While her performance disavows any vulnerability – she must be steadfast, uncompromising and smarter than her debate partner – Antonio’s performance insists on his vulnerability and the understanding that his life and body are completely in the hands of the court.

Antonio’s passive role also feminizes him in a different way: it transforms him into a piece of property. The play stresses how both Portia and Jessica are understood as property that can be bought and sold; they are women, which means that they can be appraised, traded or hoarded away by the men in their lives. I have shown how Jessica is a character who exploits this narrative of female commodity, turning herself into a coin that can be stolen away from her father. Antonio places himself in a similar role; he is made into a sack of goods, a case of spices or fine linen that is haggled over and then auctioned off. His body is dragged back and forth between the court and Shylock, each one trying to claim ownership and assert their right to do what they want with him. He is suspended in the middle of these two parties, seemingly unable to do anything about his situation. He is something like livestock; the court ultimately debates how and where Antonio can be cut open and sold off as meat. Shylock may not plan to eat Antonio’s flesh, but what he does with the flesh is irrelevant – it is debated over in much the same way that it would be at the marketplace. The difference between Antonio and livestock is that the former can speak: he arranges and cultivates this experience for himself, and designs a role in which he can appear to have no voice. Goods and animals do not, of course, have a say in what is happening to them, and, as I discussed earlier, debtors were often described as slaves; the market is, then,

an ideal situation for someone who gets pleasure from appearing helpless and at the mercy of what other people want. Antonio's status as a merchant and the play's insistent references to trade, debt, and contracts do more than create an atmosphere of risk and chance – they evoke a culture of bondage, of people understanding themselves as commodities, of desire intermingled with ownership and being owned. I argue that the way the marketplace works and how people participate in it are all primed to offer exactly the experience that Antonio designs for himself.

Commodities

The culture of the market is implicated in every scene of desire or attraction that we see in the play. The play depicts sexual feelings as inextricably bound to the market and market concepts like trade and debt. The play's understanding of desire is entirely market-driven, so much so that it becomes impossible to tell where economics ends and where desire begins; Simon Critchley and Tom McCarthy argue that, for this play, "desire *is* an economy, to be both experienced and expressed in purely economic terms."³¹² Jessica gilds herself with coins before eloping; Bassanio needs to put on a show of riches in order to court Portia (who he was interested in because of her wealth); and Antonio signs himself into a debt contract so that he can fulfill his own erotic interests. In all of these cases, money is not just an intermediary that helps make desire possible; making or losing money is itself a powerfully erotic activity, and dealing with the market is as potent as expression of desire as any physical sexual act. This was not simply a dramatic device; by the end of the sixteenth century, the power of the English market had grown exponentially, and the ability to jump social classes

³¹² "Universal Shylockery: Money and Morality in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Diacritics* 34.1 (2004) 9

led to an insistent obsession with credit, debt and trade. In this milieu, where the market and personal identity are so caught up in one another, people could think of themselves as part of the market. The pamphlets that compared debt to slavery demonstrate that people were able to imagine themselves as goods that could be bought and sold, and that debt and credit might put them in situations where they would end up being owned or owning others. My reading of the early modern is especially inspired by Jim Ellis' claim that the market's influence led to a point where "a property of the self becomes a property in the other sense."³¹³ The things that a person intrinsically "owns" – a body, a mind, a feeling, a desire – can actually be sold and traded to someone else. This intermingling of economics and identity "encourages or demands the rethinking of the borders of the self;"³¹⁴ if people can own themselves, they can therefore *be* owned by others. What I have always thought of as most inherently and inalienably mine is, in fact, property that can be severed from me and sold off if I cannot pay back my debts. I am not a self-contained, private person, but a commodity that can be placed on the open market.

If you are a potential commodity, your body is constantly open and exposed to the public. This meant that men who participated in the market were often depicted as weak and feminine (this is one of the central anxieties behind images of cuckolds in early modern plays and ballads, as I will discuss in the next chapter). They were exposed to the prying hands of the community, open to exploitation by their enemies and other people who would drain them of their riches and resources. The rise of debt

³¹³ *Sexuality and Citizenship: Metamorphosis in Elizabethan Erotic Verse*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 29

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 35

and credit meant that money was no longer seen as something to be stockpiled and stored away, but as part of a network of exchange in which it constantly changed hands.³¹⁵ The market also re-popularized the classical conceit of usufruct – the concept that the public may have a right to your property or goods. In usufruct, you do not own property: you are only using it for a time, and others may come to use it later.³¹⁶ Usufruct was also the legal term for pieces of land that were held by groups of people who could all use and profit from it at the same time.³¹⁷ Anyone could have a stake in anyone else's money or property. The popularization of these economic ideas contrasted with all of the tracts and pamphlets that promoted masculine images of autonomy, self-reliance and impenetrability. If men could be exploited by someone else at any moment, if their finances and property could be put in the hands of someone else at any time, their masculinity would be in constant peril. Laura Mandell has shown that polemicists would, later in the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, attempt to placate this anxiety by blaming women for all the negative effects of the market.³¹⁸ Women's participation in the market was classified as an effect of their "inordinate sexual appetite"³¹⁹ and desire for new things, leading to inflated prices and an overreliance on foreign imports. While these unattractive aspects of the market were attributed to women, the activity of male merchants could then be valorized as honorable and virtuous; men dealt with the market to ensure that their own homes and England's national economy would be disciplined and self-

³¹⁵ Bailey 5

³¹⁶ Ibid. 7

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ "Bawds and Merchants: Engendering Capitalist Desires." *ELH* 59.1 (1992) 107

³¹⁹ Ibid.

sufficient.³²⁰

In the late sixteenth century, however, these arguments had not been made yet, and the market was still a place of social and personal risk. This is one of the anxieties that the play draws on when it depicts Antonio's masochistic desires. He is going to be cut open during the trial scene and exposed in front of the community, which will make him appear weak and easily exploitable. His insides will be pulled back for all to see, and he will no longer be the private, self-contained and impenetrable man that was expected in early modern society. Antonio becomes a public commodity that has no privacy and that everyone gets to manhandle and trade amongst themselves. His body is like a sack of goods open to the highest bidder. Antonio tells Bassanio that he does not regret paying his friend's debt, "For if the Jew do cut but deep enough, I'll pay it presently with all my heart."³²¹ He seems to mean that he will pay the debt with all of his "heart" – in other words, his affection and friendship – but he also simply means that he will be paying it off with his flesh, blood and organs. His actual body is transformed into the goods that will be used to pay Shylock back; Critics have traditionally felt that Shylock, though he appears to represent the new market, actually rejects profit in pursuing his bond for Antonio's flesh. Shylock himself admits as much, of course; he claims that a "pound of man's flesh taken from a man/Is not so estimable, profitable neither,/As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats."³²² Amanda Bailey finds, however, that because the play depicts money and flesh as equivalent forms of property, distinguishing between the two or stating that one is rejected in favor of the

³²⁰ Ibid. 108

³²¹ 4.1.288-9

³²² 1.3.164-6

other is creating “a false dichotomy”³²³ that does not actually exist. Shylock is willing to accept Antonio’s flesh as repayment of the bond because, on some level, he sees it as a form of profit; it may be less of a profit than mutton or beef, but his suit is financially sound, even if it is only in a symbolic sense.³²⁴ Shylock never stops being a creditor, and while he seems to be pursuing a fruitless bond, he is actually making sure that he recovers the money he is owed. Antonio’s bond is predicated on the fact that the value of his flesh is equal to the money that was originally lent out, as well as on the fact that Shylock will find it worthwhile to accept repayment in this way. Antonio’s flesh may not be worth as much as a goat’s, but it still carries a symbolic market value. Shylock is making a good deal on at least some level: Antonio’s body is, in some sense, worth something, and Shylock recognizes this symbolic value.

The idea of becoming a coin is precisely the sort of fantasy that a masochist might crave. You are turned you into a public object without any say in how you are being used and traded, in the process effacing your identity and free will. However, being put into public circulation is not random or lawless, and this is essential for a masochistic scenario to be successful; masochists find pleasure in pain and humiliation because there is a delicately designed script underwriting these feelings. The market was regulated by a series of economic rules that were being codified at the end of the sixteenth century, and that would become more stable during the seventeenth century.³²⁵ These rules tried to ensure that the market was completely logical even at its most merciless, making it an attractive setting for masochistic scenes. In fact, the

³²³ “Shylock and the Slaves” 2

³²⁴ Ibid.

market and masochism have a natural affinity for one another because they work much the same way. If you buy, sell, invest or incur debt in the market, Valerie Forman describes this as a “multi-stage process” in which “goods or money are converted into a form that can be used to purchase different goods.”³²⁶ The point is not to buy once, sell once, invest once or take on debt once; you buy to sell, take on debt to buy, and invest to give out credit to others. Masochism works through a similar multi-part process of investment, conversion and transformation. It is not as simple as saying that one receives pain and this produces pleasure; to put it in economic terms, one takes on the “debt” of pain, humiliation and helplessness. The burden of this debt and the necessity of paying it off are not, however, hardships that are incurred in order to pay the rent or pay back gambling losses; they are ends in and of themselves, and are an investment that will end up in pleasure. The masochist receives more pleasure with every debt; the goal is not to get rid of debt, but to build it up and live within it. Their erotic life is defined by constantly being in thrall and in debt to a contract or a bondsman (always, of course, on their own terms).

This debt is paid back by selling it off to onlookers and observers – citizens at the marketplace, an audience at a trial, one’s closest friends and lovers. The masochistic scene, much like currency, must be “bought into” and believed by those who participate in it. When consumers ordinarily buy a product at the market, they presumably know what they are getting or what they are signing up for. In the case of these masochistic narratives, however, participants may not realize that they have been

³²⁵ See Zachary Lesser’s discussion of Mun and Misselden in “Tragical-Comical-Pastoral-Colonial: Economic Sovereignty, Globalization, and the Form of Tragicomedy.” *ELH* 74.4 (2007) 881-908

recruited in order to validate or activate someone else's erotic fantasy. They might not necessarily be aware that they have been cast as actors in a staged story, which means that the masochist must become a sort of salesperson. How can I make these people believe that I really am as horrible, tainted and unworthy as I want to appear? How do I sell my narrative so that this gathered audience will believe that this is really what is happening to me and that this really what I feel? Masochists need to learn the tricks of the market – how to sell a product, how to convince consumers that their goods are worth buying, how to use the public space of the market as an opportunity to reach a wide, varied audience. If their narrative is not sold off, if the gathered crowd and the intended participants do not buy into it and believe it, the masochist will not have accomplished his or her objective, and their desire will be unfulfilled. The sight of a man who is persecuted by a villainous Jew, alone and in need of pity, is far different from the sight of a man who has obviously arranged this scene for himself and is acting it out for some mysterious purpose. If the masochist's poor salesmanship gives rise to the latter reaction, his or her erotic narrative has failed (unless, of course, this failure was the very point of that narrative all the time).

In this sense, masochistic salesmanship has a theatrical quality. Much like an actor, the masochistic needs to give a convincing performance. The audience needs to believe in what both the masochist and the actor feel, or else they will not be able to invest themselves in the narratives being sold by these performers. If an actor fails to convince his audience, he might get a lesser role when the next play comes around, or the audience may spread bad word-of-mouth about this production; if a masochist fails

³²⁶ *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern Stage*. (Philadelphia: University

to convince his or her audience, however, an entire erotic structure will crumble. One of the great tensions in this play is the relationship between theatricality and masochism: two levels of performance are required by the actor playing Antonio, and each is intricately bound up with the other. On the one hand, a theatrical performance is an economic event; the main purpose of a play is that an audience must be enticed into attending it, and for this reason it needs to market itself as something provocative or unexpected. The erotic interests of *The Merchant of Venice* are constructed as such in order to appeal to the theater-going public and to compete with other plays on the theatrical market; the play depicts an unintuitive and compelling form of desire that might interest a savvy, cynical audience. On the other hand, these erotic interests are powerfully connected to the market. Masochistic desires thrive on a relationship to the market: its logic and language are sources of inspiration and potent models for how to design and perform an erotic narrative. The play depicts erotic desires for an economic purpose, but the characters in the play use economic systems to articulate those erotic desires. This tangle is one of the reasons that the play can seem so confused or conflicted about how to present the erotic feelings that Jessica and Antonio experience: it wants to make money by staging these desires, but those desires can only express themselves by being bound up with money or at least the idea of exchange, commodity, trade and contractual obligations.

I argue that the market and its logic offers raw material for *The Merchant of Venice*; it provides a language that the play can use to articulate and dramatize the desires of characters like Antonio. The alienation, vulnerability and humiliation that

one might suffer in the market become possible templates for a masochistic experience. These images show a masochist how they might appear impotent and useless in front of their friends and neighbors, how they could present themselves as failures, how they might be regarded as untrustworthy, sickly, unwanted or undesirable. Contractual thinking is one of the vital vocabularies that early modern masochists were able to draw from. Drew Daniel finds that contracts, precisely because of their “neutral language” and unemotional legalese, are sites for “a plethora of libidinal investments.”³²⁷ Contracts can be filled in with the erotic interests of those who agree to them, and, due to the way they can bind someone into a situation that will lead to their own downfall, these erotic interests are most often masochistic. The rise of contracts and contract law in England coincided with recognition – at least in the period’s plays – that these contracts could be used as vehicles for finding pleasure in the experience of pain and humiliation.

The drama originally set its depictions of masochism on the continent; masochism was a “practice of foreign Catholics”³²⁸ like Antonio or Helena and not yet an English concern. In the next two chapters I will show that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, theater began to make masochism into a much more English issue. It first located these desires in English merchants and shopkeepers, and would soon enough point out the masochistic relationship that theatrical audiences had to the plays they paid to see. I will first discuss the figure of the wittol. Wittols are cuckolds who know that they are being cuckolded, but who actively encourage and enjoy this fact. The wittol is a counterintuitive concept in early modern studies, which has taken

³²⁷ “Let me have judgment” 224

for granted a culture of male anxiety and paranoia about female chastity. Wittols offer us a chance to turn this assumption on its head; these men actually wanted to be cuckolded. This is a significant development in my argument because it localizes masochism in a very much English context – wittols were most often depicted as local English people, and the implication was that your local grocer or next-door neighbor could be involved in this lifestyle.

³²⁸ Toulalan 93

CHAPTER III

The benefits of being a wittol in early modern city comedies

Conventional wisdom about early modern masculinity states that men were wildly paranoid about being cuckolded. This was a pervasive fear, and it was considered one of the most shameful things that could happen to a man. What if, however, there were a type of man who actually enjoyed the fact that he might be cuckolded? What if he invited other men to sleep with his wife, and what if this idea made him extremely excited? In this chapter, I will explore exactly this figure, who defies so much of the conventional wisdom that scholars have long rehearsed about masculinity, male anxiety, gender dynamics and social expectations for men in early modern England. Early modern criticism has traditionally held that becoming a cuckold was the ultimate horror for any early modern men. If a man's wife cheats on him, this means that he does not have any control over her: she can do what she wants, and is not impressed with his demands or desires. When this happens, the cuckolded husband is exposed as foolish, gullible and, above all, impotent, unworthy of being seen as equal with other men. This is a concept that flies in the face of critical assumptions about what men wanted to be and what would be complete anathema to them. Wittols encourage their own humiliation and sometimes step in to ensure that it continues; if a wittol's wife planned to end an affair with her lover, a wittol would work behind the scenes to mend the relationship and keep it going. Wittols are especially happy if these affairs bring in revenue: wittols often blackmail their rivals, or even establish agreements that state the rival can sleep with the wittol's wife as long as he supports the wittol's lifestyle, pays his rent, provides for his children, loads his

table with food, etc. Wittols are emasculated, usually in a very public way and right in front of their friends and neighbors, but they don't mind and are content with the personal and financial profit that they have received.

In an early modern culture that seems so obsessed with chastity, domestic mastery and the anxiety of being cuckolded, the idea of a wittol might seem like a bizarre fantasy. Why would these men enjoy the experience of being cuckolded? What are they getting out of it and how could they possibly experience any pleasure from this situation? The culture was, however, fascinated with these figures, and writers capitalized on this fascination in ballads, poems, jokes, songs and plays. The complete incongruity between wittols and what we have come to expect from early modern attitudes toward cuckoldry must have made for morbidly provocative entertainment, especially since audiences and readers were expected to abide by rules of sexual propriety in their own lives. Wittols were not, however, simply fantasy figures who were good for a joke or an interesting dramatic twist; they represented, it is true, a shockingly subversive and uncomfortably amusing concept, but they were also very familiar to the average English citizen – the word has its origins in the late medieval period, and it was popularly used by English poets, playwrights, and balladeers.³²⁹ The cuckold was a popular and decidedly English figure, and people could often identify cuckolds in their own communities. It should be specified that, while there are a small number of historical accounts that back-up this claim, this chapter is especially concerned with the culture of rumors, hearsay, and urban discourse that developed around cuckolds. Neighbors often asserted that certain cuckolds were well-aware of

³²⁹ "Cuckold." OED Online. Second Edition, Oxford UP. February 11th, 2003.

their position but were helpless to stop it, and some community members even claimed that some cuckolds actually consented to their role. If wittols had not actually existed, they would probably have been imagined by an early modern culture of gossip and leering scrutiny.

I argue that wittols experience a great deal of pleasure, and that they profit from their situation in both financial and sexual terms. They cultivate and revel in the feelings of shame, dishonor, and inadequacy that accompanied being a cuckold; these inadequacies and disgraces are not obstacles to expressing their sexuality, but the means through which they express their sexuality. They are bad husbands, bad householders and bad community members, and it is this shame that drives and defines their desires. It is a shame that is so potent and fulfilling to them that they actively strive to remain wittols as long as possible. I want to discuss their desire as masochistic, and to build on the insights of psychoanalysis to think about the wittol as a type of masochist. Wittols, like the other masochists we have witnessed, do not simply find pleasure in pain: this experience is highly structured and very deliberately scripted and staged. Wittols bind themselves into contracts that allow them control over what seems to be an oppressive and humiliating situation; they seem to be getting the worst of it, but they have agreed to and are ultimately in command of their own disgrace. They have designed and are responsible for their status as a cuckold, and this becomes the prime engine of their erotic feelings.

There is a sense that early modern attitudes about masculinity actually encouraged this sort of masochistic logic. If husbands could not tame and manage their wives, they were culpable for any cheating that they suffered; women might not

be able to control themselves, but men should be able to control women and were ultimately responsible for their behavior. Jennifer Panek argues that the paranoid and insistently anxious culture of early modern England “holds a woman's chastity as her highest value, and a husband's failure to guard that chastity as his lowest humiliation”.³³⁰ There was also, at the same time, a pervasive assumption that all husbands would be cuckolded at some point, no matter how thoroughly they supervised their wives and how minutely female sexuality was policed. The contradictions inherent in these two concepts naturally created a sense of anxiety; if men had to incessantly monitor every action their wives made, and yet still could not keep them from cheating and shaming them in front of the community, they had to find some avenue of control and mastery through which they could prove they were still a successful citizen and householder. The idea of wittolry offers early modern men the chance to gain power and control through the very fact that they are powerless and without any control. Panek claims that because a wittol takes “control of his wife's adultery,” he therefore “paradoxically evades the stigma of the cuckold.”³³¹ This fantasy of maintaining control might account for the wittol's popular appeal, and would explain the regular presence of these figures in plays and ballads. I argue that the personal and spiritual profit that the wittol gains is important, but that it is also essential to consider the literal, monetary profit they receive.

There was a popular connection between cuckolds and the economy; it was almost axiomatic that cuckolds were rich, and that there was some tie between being

³³⁰ “‘A Wittall Cannot Be a Cookold’: Reading the Contented Cuckold in Early Modern English Drama and Culture.” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 1.2 (2001) 66

³³¹ *Ibid.* 76

wealthy and being unable to satisfy or properly watch over one's wife. Cuckolds were mocked in spite of their wealth, and their money was seen as tainted and coming at too high a price. What, however, is this relationship between cuckolds and wealth? What is it based on? How did cuckolds become rich in the first place? The most common cuckold narrative was that of the wealthy merchant and his bored, un-stimulated wife. The wife is always seduced by an enterprising stranger who takes what he wants. The man who takes what he wants is depicted as having less money, but he has the freedom to decide his own affairs and has earned the respect of other men. The merchant who takes what is given to him, on the other hand, is rich but easily exploited and is ultimately not respected by the community. I argue that this was an expression of an anxiety about "taking" something from someone else, like a charitable handout, or being "given" something that one has not claimed as their right. Early modern Englishmen were supposed to "take" things by force or ingenuity, and not be given them; even poets praising or appealing to their patrons asserted that it was their own talent that warranted patronage and not charity or need. The idea of being given something that one has not earned, whether respect, privilege or money, is emasculating. Men should never take, and they should certainly never be "taken in" – fooled, gulled or exploited. They need to do the taking themselves. Merchants were rich, but they also were associated with passive taking – sitting back complacently while other people worked hard to buy their wares. I will illustrate this point by discussing Massinger's comedy *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, a play in which characters are deeply horrified at the thought of taking anything from anyone else. Wellborn, the play's young hero, bends over backwards to make sure that he receives

nothing that he has not worked and fought for, and he ultimately takes what he wants from the play's villains.

If the characters in Massinger's play cannot stand the thought of taking anything from anyone else, wittols find pleasure in taking and want to "take" as much as they can. They take it and like it, and are either unconcerned about how their community will perceive them or are actually proud of their situation. They are happy to profit from the fact that other men are sleeping with their wives; this profit usually consisted of money or extra leisure time, but it could also lead to the abstract, masochistic sexual gratification that I discussed earlier in this project. I will examine how these different pleasures were imagined in early modern texts, and will first read songs and ballads like "The Merry Cuckold" and "Fortune's Bounty." These poems illustrate the personal and economic profits that could result from performing the role of an impotent but also wily cuckold who takes what he does not deserve from his wife's lovers. The narrators of these poems are extremely happy about their situation, and are not ashamed about how the community might see them. They are happy to "take it" from the men who are sleeping with their wives if it enables them to live a life of ease and luxury. They do not, however, necessarily receive an erotic charge from these relationships: they exploit the expectations that society has placed on them as men and husbands, and are able to financially and personally profit.

I will conclude the chapter with a close reading of Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, a play that directly dramatizes a wittol's erotic pleasure. I will focus on the character of Allwit, a very merry cuckold who relishes the fact that he is being cuckolded and finds that he is much happier than any normal husband. He

profits enormously in financial and social terms; his table, his children and his wallet are all provided for by Sir Walter Whorehound, the pimp and con artist who has been cuckolding him for years. He also, however, enjoys great personal satisfaction, and sees Sir Walter as the god who is giving him all that he could ever want out of life. These feelings are potently erotic and sexual, and Allwit is explicit about how good this situation makes him feel. It is important to note that he is in complete control of his experience as a wittol, and actively cultivates it throughout the play. He not only wants Whorehound to continue cuckolding him, but sets in motion a plan that guarantees he will cuckold him and him alone; Allwit does not want to share the gains of his wittolry with anyone else. It is also remarkable that he suffers none of the dangers and pitfalls that other wittols face in many ballads and pamphlets about cuckoldry: he is successful and happy but is also respected by his friends and neighbors. The members of his community are either unaware that he is a wittol or know about his situation but respect him anyway as a husband and householder. Allwit is a potentially unique figure in this regard: aware of his own sexual interests, willing to live a lifestyle that supports those interests, and respected by a community that would ordinarily regard him as ridiculous and deviant. He may be a very rare character, but Allwit's explicit eroticism offers us a vivid portrait of how a wittol might design, cultivate and luxuriate in the pleasure of his wife cheating on him.

The concept of the wittol is vital to this project because it makes the structures of masochism immediate to English playgoers and readers. The masochism that we noticed in *The Merchant of Venice* was a potent illustration of how these desires could be dramatized in the early modern period, but it was also presented as abstract and

foreign; the masochism of wittolry, however, is often depicted as much more local. The average English person was invited to see members of their own community reflected in the wittol, and were even asked to imagine themselves in the role and to consider how they would behave if they were in the wittol's shoes. The wittols I am discussing in this chapter were not French or Italian, across the sea and easy to ignore as foreign oddities; they were the barber from around the corner, the merchant down the street, your own neighbor or even a friend or a relative. These texts about wittols made explicit the idea that masochism was an option open to anyone, even the audience member at a play or the person reading a pamphlet or a ballad, and that there could be a very different way for English people to think about the forms through which they gain pleasure and profit.

This point about wittols is also important to make because early modern criticism has paid very little attention to this figure; it has only been a small group of scholars, among them Jennifer Panek, Gary Kuchar, Daniel Juan Gil and Elizabeth Hanson, who have taken an interest in wittols and the ways that they defy accepted notions about early modern masculinity. I want to add to this conversation in two ways. Firstly, I will relate wittolry to masochism, which gives wittolry a new centrality in discussions about the development of sexuality in the early modern period. If we want to understand early modern sex, we will need to seriously consider figures like the wittol and ways that they dovetail with emerging trends like masochism. Secondly, I want to draw attention to the figures that defy early modern scholarship's popular assumptions; I feel it is essential that we question these assumptions so that we can continue to get a more nuanced picture of early modern

society. In this chapter, I will attempt to overturn some of these assumed notions, and to suggest that wittols are an area where can we start to question much of what we have taken for granted about early modern gender roles and erotic expression.

Male Anxiety, the Community, and Cuckolds

This discussion about cuckolds must begin with an overview of early modern masculinity. Young men in early modern England were able to ascend to manhood when they got married. Ira Clark's research has found that marriage gave a man "access to privileges and assigned him responsibilities in the community that were disallowed earlier in life."³³² This was because managing a family, supporting a wife and maintaining a household were seen as evidence of self-control and maturity. Alexandra Shepherd's work (which has been a vital resource for how I understand early modern masculinity) supports this claim; she finds that, because the household was looked on "both as a primary unit of society and as a microcosm of the polity",³³³ mastery of one's wife and family consequently connoted a mastery of broader social and political obligations. Before marriage, a man could not be taken seriously as a community leader and would not be truly respected by his community; he could not partake in the benefits of a patriarchal society, and was looked down on as inadequate. The transition to gaining this mastery was, however, fraught with anxiety over the supposedly natural unruliness that lurked in the spirits of all women. Plays, poems, misogynist pamphlets and popular rhetoric held that women were all scandalously unruly, and that marriage was an opportunity for that unruliness to be expressed while

³³² *Comedy, Youth, Manhood in Early Modern England*. (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2003)

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³³³ *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 75

hiding it beneath the disguise of a legal, spiritual union. These texts held that when a woman was married, it was almost instinctual for her to also become wasteful and promiscuous. Mark Breitenberg argues that one of a husband's jobs, and perhaps the most important way that he could demonstrate his personal and social mastery, was to establish "control over his wife, her propriety in sexuality, obedience in activities, humility in dress, manner and language"³³⁴ and so on. Young wives were closely scrutinized by the community, but young husbands were even more closely watched for how well they could manage and bridle their unruly wives. Husbands had to rely on the sexual chastity of their wives to validate their own identity;³³⁵ their positions in the community rested on how well they could secure that chastity and suppress these unruly desires. If they were unable to control their wives and were proven to be weak and impotent, they lost all of the social benefits that they had gained as male householders and were forced to forfeit their obviously fraudulent claim to manhood.³³⁶

The community was intent on keeping a strict watch on the power dynamic that existed between married couples; Laura Gowing finds that noticing, gossiping about and judging how thoroughly a husband controlled his wife's sexuality was a project that "demanded and encouraged the active participation of ordinary neighbors, women as well as men."³³⁷ The supposed unpredictability of female sexuality was a threat to the male-centric legal and moral system that tried to apply order to the

³³⁴ Clark 18

³³⁵ "Anxious Masculinity: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England." *Feminist Studies* 19.2 (1993) 390

³³⁶ Shepherd 82

³³⁷ "Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England." *Signs* 37.4 (2012) 814

community,³³⁸ and husbands were seen as the first line of defense against unruly female desires that would otherwise disrupt social peace. His neighbors were then a policing force that was enlisted to make sure a husband did his duty and prevented an unbridled woman from ruining their quality of life. The neighborhood response to any failure was intensely public; husbands who did not meet proper social standards were publically harassed, and information about their homelife was loudly gossiped about and communally commented on. Anne-Marie Kilday and David Nash's research into the public treatment of inadequate husbands has shown that by "shaming transgressors in the full glare of the public gaze, communities hoped to publicize scandal, to rectify bad behavior and also to warn others of the likely consequences of similar indiscretions."³³⁹ It was not enough for a husband to be shamed – other husbands had to know that they would be equally shamed if they could not keep their wives under control.

Anne-Marie Kilday and David Nash's work has been instrumental in understanding how these faulty husbands were treated by the community. If a husband proved to be inadequate enough, if he repeatedly allowed himself to be cuckolded or did nothing as his wife flaunted her lack of restraint, he was made the subject of "rough music": his neighbors would make loud, humiliating noises whenever he came into town, scream out catcalls, bang pots together under his windows, and so on.³⁴⁰ The point was to make his life miserable, and to remind him of the community's

³³⁸ Habermann, Ina. *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) 71

³³⁹ *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain, 1600-1900*. (New York: Palgrave, 2010) 10

³⁴⁰ Ibid. 28

judgment even when he was in his home or about to fall asleep. The targets of these public disgraces were mostly men;³⁴¹ women were more commonly ostracized through silent shaming, which was just as ritualized but much less spectacular and explicit. The act of “rough music” was not only about making loud noises and being obnoxious, however; it could be dangerous and violent on top of being humiliating.³⁴² Husbands would sometimes be taken from their beds in the middle of the night, dunked in the local lake, pelted with rocks, beaten with rods, covered with manure and then deposited back on their doorstep. If a man did not fulfill his responsibilities, if his ineffectualness prompted his neighbors to take action against him, his actual body would have to be shamed and taught a lesson. If men were not socially and physically disciplined in this way, the thinking went, the community would be overrun with deviance, immorality, crime and other consequences of unmanly laziness, impotence and bad housekeeping.

The popular imagination allowed for one area, at least, where a weak and lazy husband might actually gain from his lack of control and mastery: his pocketbook. It was commonly held that there was some connection between being a cuckold and being wealthy.³⁴³ Plays, ballads and pamphlets about men who have been cuckolded by their wives also tended to depict those men as wealthy merchants who were flush with cash and otherwise extremely successful. Merchants, much like widows, were familiar allegories for wealth and commerce. Elizabeth Hanson offers a particularly helpful insight when she argues that widows were depicted as being themselves pieces

³⁴¹ Ibid. 30

³⁴² Ibid. 39

of property, a living, anthropomorphic form of currency; she claims that this was because a widow, “like money, changes hands and in doing so changes men’s fortunes.”³⁴⁴ Widows became symbolic of the treasure and upward mobility that young men had to strive for. Merchants, on the other hand, came to represent the way that cash and property passed quickly from one owner to another, meaning that no one held onto a specific form of wealth for very long.³⁴⁵ Merchants need to patiently endure the changing face of the marketplace, taking what they can, when they can; even in times of prosperity, a merchant must “accustom himself to allowing wealth and commodity to pass from his hands into that of another.”³⁴⁶ This made them ideal symbols for cuckoldry, since cuckolds must also sit by passively while something of value is transferred out of their hands and into the hands of another man. This was also a way to make merchants into figures of ridicule, displacing the anxiety that some might feel about the wealth and social mobility that the merchant class was very quickly accumulating.

In some sense, the insistence on portraying merchants as cuckolds was a way to make sure that this rising merchant class was popularly understood to be ridiculous and impotent. If merchants were able to make so much money, and were able to do it so quickly, there must surely be something wrong with them. It is up to people who are lower on the economic ladder, whether they are compelled by anxiety, envy, or aristocratic patronage, to find a flaw in this ascending class and fully exploit it, even if

³⁴³ Bruster, Douglas. “The Horn of Plenty: Cuckoldry and Capital in the Drama of the Age of Shakespeare.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30.2 (1990) 197

³⁴⁴ “There’s Meat and Money Too: Rich Widows and Allegories of Wealth in Jacobean City Comedy.”

ELH 72.1 (2005) 225

³⁴⁵ Bruster 205

that flaw is only an imagined one that is found more in folk tales and ballads than in the actual, lived experience of people who made their wealth on commerce and trade. The notion of merchants being cuckolds meant that while these men might have a great deal of money, and while they might supposedly be lording all of their gains and riches over people who do not have as much as they do, these merchants are actually weak and vulnerable in an extremely intimate and sensitive area. If merchants have so much wealth and are capable of buying whatever they want (even land or a title), but are also being duped in the bedroom by their wives, how much is all of their treasure really worth? Is it better, in other words, to be poor and in total command of your desires, than rich but an impotent fool who has no mastery over his sexual life? If you are a regular person watching plays and listening to ballads about the merchants who seem to have so much where you have so little, it may seem empowering to believe that merchants are nevertheless complete failures when it comes to pleasing and controlling their unruly wives.

This relationship between cuckolds and wealth was only a popular fantasy, of course, but it is true that cuckolds often profited from their situation. It was common for a cuckold to receive at least some financial support or remuneration from the man who was sleeping with his wife; this was often because the man who was doing the cuckolding feared being blackmailed or didn't want the cuckolded husband to cause a fuss and stop the adulterous relationship from continuing. He would probably not grow rich like the cuckolded merchants in plays and ballads, but he would receive some extra help to provide for his family's table and at least slightly fatten his own

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

wallet. Alexandra Shepherd submits that if a cuckold actually did profit from his situation, he was protected against one of the more debilitating charges made against weak husbands: that they had no credit and were not worth doing business with.³⁴⁷ The profiting cuckold could show the community that he still had some value as a business partner and as someone they could trade with, give credit to and invest in. The price for being a financially sound cuckold was that a husband still had to live with the shameful knowledge that his wife was cheating on him. They also need to live with the knowledge that their prosperity is entirely in the hands of someone else, and that they have personally not done any work to gain this wealth.

Giving It and Taking It

This was a price that was far too steep for many early modern men. If Stephen Greenblatt's writings on self-fashioning have demonstrated how much men worked to present themselves as self-made and self-reliant, there was an equal effort to stave off any attempt to give them something or support them. I argue that early modern masculinity was partly founded on a fear of taking anything from anyone else. They may accept help, patronage or charity in private, but in public they would need to distance themselves from it or at least appear like they have merited such support through their own natural excellence. They have, in other words, deserved that support and claim it as their right. This was the stance taken by so many poets and playwrights who were aided by wealthy patrons; they honor and praise their patrons, but their most common compliment was that a patron had the good taste to fund such a worthy and deserving writer as themselves. If a man did not prove how deeply he merited this sort

³⁴⁷ *Meanings of Manhood* 187

of patronage or support, he would be seen as idle and lazy, the type of person who was willing to accept money or social positions that he had not actually strived for and earned. This would do a great deal of damage to his social and personal credibility, and would hamper his ability to climb the social ladder later on in his life.³⁴⁸ Early modern men were supposed to take what they wanted through their own ingenuity and cleverness, and were looked down on for openly taking handouts. If a man did receive some gains that he did not actually work and strive for, such as some sort of specious patronage or a handout clearly intended as charity, a key skill was being savvy enough to act like this help was very much well-deserved.

This tension between taking from others and taking for oneself is at the center of Philip Massinger's city comedy *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. In this play, the main characters express a great horror of taking something that they have not appeared to deserve. They vigorously defend themselves against any attempt by characters to give them aid or help, and loudly proclaim that they could never live with the shame of accepting these offerings. The most outspoken character in this regard is Wellborn, the play's young hero; he is an aristocrat and former landowner who lost all of his property and wealth to the machinations of Sir Giles Overreach, a sadistic and ambitious member of the *nouveau riche*. When he is unable to pay his tab at the local tavern and is forced to leave the bar, Wellborn is offered money by his well-meaning friend Allworth. Wellborn rejects this offer completely, and cannot disguise how much he hates the idea of taking this sort of charity from anyone. It is the last thing in the world that he would ever do:

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 191

Money from thee?
From a boy? A stipendiary? One that lives
At the devotion of a stepmother
And the uncertain favor of a lord?
I'll eat my arms first. Howsoe'er blind Fortune
Hath spent the last of her malice on me –
Though I am vomited out of an alehouse,
And, thus accoutred, know not where to eat,
Or drink, or sleep, but underneath this canopy –
Although I thank thee, I despise thy offer.³⁴⁹

Wellborn is dressed in rags, has no food, no shelter and no prospects, but he refuses to accept the help that Allworth has offered to him. The shame of taking this money would be overwhelming – especially because it would happen in public, in sight of the whole community and directly in front of the bar that he has just been ejected from. The fact that Allworth needs to rely on his stepmother and the tentative support of a patron for his money would only make Wellborn's shame all the more pronounced. It is better for him to suffer in silence, because this alternative would be honorable and manly. He may have nothing to his name, but at least he has his pride and the respect of the community. He can currently blame all of his problems on "blind Fortune" and struggle against them; if he starts to receive handouts and becomes a charity case, he cannot claim to be persevering with manliness and honorably fighting against his situation. Wellborn needs to maintain this image so that he can become a community leader when he regains his lands and wealth.

Sir Giles Overreach is rich enough to not have to worry about taking anything from anyone else, but he has an equal fear of anybody taking something from him. He is always on his guard against being cheated or manipulated, and assumes that anyone

³⁴⁹ English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology, Eds. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Maus, Eric Rasmussen (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002) 1.1.172-81

with any sort of claim on his money is a liar or con artist. When Wellborn insinuates that he cheated him out of his lands and owes him a debt, Overreach cries out, “I in thy debt? Oh, impudence!”³⁵⁰ The idea that Wellborn would have the ability to take something from him is insulting. Overreach’s claims to male identity and his path to financial success are entirely built on taking from others and cheating and exploiting them, and he cannot risk gaining a reputation for letting others take from him. When his daughter expresses pity for the degraded state of an aristocratic lady, Overreach is incredulous: “Pity her? Trample on her!”³⁵¹ If a man like Overreach shows pity or lends out a helping hand, he may be exposing himself to a cheat, a thief or simply a charity case; any of these people would be able to drain him of his funds and reveal him before the community as a sucker and a man who can be easily taken from. He would be exposed as a naïve, inurbane mark who can be easily taken advantage of and has no real business sense. He would be, in other words, the person that Wellborn refuses to become: the type of person who has no idea how the economy works, who is willing to give away his money and goods, and who can be easily exploited and milked of all that he is worth. If he doesn’t know how to keep this money and property, he doesn’t deserve it – and it can go into the hands of someone who knows how to take it and thus actually deserves to own it.

Overreach is adamant that anyone who tries to take from him or beg something of him must be pushed away. He even feels this way about his friends and relatives:

We worldly men, when we see friends and kinsmen
Past hope sunk in their fortunes, lend no hand
To lift ‘em up, but rather set our feet

³⁵⁰ 5.1.160

³⁵¹ 3.2.42

Upon their heads to press ‘em to the bottom.³⁵²

It is not enough for Overreach to distance himself from these charity cases – he needs to actively press them down and make sure that they stay as low as possible. If Overreach gives them an inch, they make take a mile, and he cannot allow this happen. Alexandra Shepherd argues that, in the eyes of the community, a man who spent too much of his time providing for others and diverting “resources from the household economy was labeled as dishonest, negligent, and unseemly.”³⁵³ When Overreach violently repels anyone with the slightest claim on him, he is not only being jealous of his bank account: he is protecting his masculine image, and ultimately preventing any of his friends and neighbors from calling him wasteful or a bad manager of his household’s finances. In an early modern culture where reputation counts for so much, Overreach is not willing to take any chances with how he will be perceived. He wants to be seen as impenetrable and self-sustaining, incapable of being exploited or ripped off; at stake are both his personal wealth and his image of himself as a true man. This is the core concept that informs Wellborn and Overreach’s profound anxiety over how they are seen by others: Wellborn is paranoid about being thought of as someone who takes charity, and Overreach is paranoid about being thought of as someone who gives charity.

It is important to note that Wellborn and Overreach seem to take no pleasure in their paranoia. Their anxiety is purely utilitarian: this is a matter of survival, of being a successful member of society, of proving that you are the right kind of man and the right kind of person. The culture of giving and taking is not an occasion for feeling

³⁵² 3.3.50-3

good or enjoying oneself; it seems to specifically ignore or suppress these pleasurable sensations. When Overreach criticizes one of his associates for being too interested in fine food, he tells him that “We must forget the belly/When we think of profit.”³⁵⁴ While most people might gain profit with the ultimate goal of satisfying their bellies, Overreach sees profit and gain as ends in and of themselves. He does not need or want to think of his belly, and dedicates all of his energy to making money and vigorously defending his status as a landowner and a man. Overreach is so anxious to portray himself as financially successful and an unimpeachable master of his household that he has blocked out any feelings that would get in the way of that goal: he is “insensible of remorse, or pity,/Or the least sting of conscience.”³⁵⁵ This also means that he is insensible to the pleasures of anxiety and discomfort, pleasures that have often been eagerly expressed by characters in other early modern comedies. When Overreach’s plans are undone and all of his backroom schemes are exposed, he does not express any thrill or refer to any pleasurable tension; he bitterly complains that he has been made to look like such a fool that his anger and frustration have become “ridiculous.”³⁵⁶ There is no hint of delight in these lines: they are impotent without any showing any excitement about that impotence.

The play itself shows no interest in pursuing the possibility of such pleasures, and is rather insistent on that refusal. While the masochists we have seen in earlier chapters placed great importance in the idea of contracts and the notion of being legally obligated to fulfill a humiliating task, the characters of this play treat those

³⁵³ *Meanings of Manhood* 186

³⁵⁴ 1.3.32-3

³⁵⁵ 4.1.29-30

contracts with contempt and disrespect. In the play's final scenes, Wellborn is able to take his property back from Overreach because the deed that they signed has been irreparably defaced. Marall, one of Overreach's henchmen, has double-crossed his boss and burned away the contract's text with acid; all that is left of the contract is a blank sheet, a "fair skin of parchment."³⁵⁷ This would be a disastrous event to a traditional masochist – contracts are one of the defining forces in a masochist's erotic life, and one of the principal ways that masochists arrange their personal and sexual narratives. The characters in this play do not regard contracts with any erotic sacredness or fetishistic value; they are pieces of paper that can be altered, signed, ripped apart or lost without any effect on their desires. Contracts are a means to an end, and not an end in and of themselves. In Overreach's final scene in the play, he observes that he might as well have had "made a contract with the king of fiends"³⁵⁸ than with Wellborn and all of his clever machinations. Antonio and his Christian friends also claimed that their adversary was as bad as an inhuman devil, but Antonio was happy to bind himself to that fiend and accept all of the uncomfortable pleasures that would result. Overreach, however, has no interest in this choice; he sees no erotic charge in binding himself to someone who will abuse and exploit him. He can only see the unattractive and ruinous shame that he will suffer as a man who has been cheated out of his property.

Taking It and Liking It

Wittols – men who encourage and enjoy the idea that their wives are cheating

³⁵⁶ 5.1.240

³⁵⁷ 5.1.184

³⁵⁸ 5.1.279

on them – do not mind this shame. They actually want to “take it” from someone else; they want to be the weaker man, to be exploited and cheated, to look like they cannot manage their finances, their households or their wives. In return, they receive a profit that allows them to support a leisurely lifestyle without sweating to maintain their table or keep up their social image. While regular cuckolds who profit from their situation usually do so in a passive way – accepting money to keep quiet, for instance – a wittol actually plans and organizes his own cuckolding, setting the terms of when it will happen, how often it will happen, and how much of a payment they will receive. This was a very subversive way of making money: it flew in the face of the accepted notions about masculinity that were discussed earlier in this chapter, notions that were popularly understood as the pillars of an ordered and decorous social life. These notions lent themselves to the sort of paranoia and anxiety experienced by the characters of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, constantly looking out for any hint that they are being exploited or seen as a charity case. Jennifer Panek determines that this anxiety meant that “marriage and householding could appear as an intolerable burden rather than as part of the welcome privileges of patriarchy.”³⁵⁹ Owning a house and being a husband became an exhausting job that was never quite over – men were expected to be on constant patrol, incessantly policing their own behavior and the chastity of their wives. The idea of the wittol offered an escape from this burden, a way for men to counter any anxiety and make a very unique kind of profit. Wittols are, therefore, a “wish-fulfillment fantasy figure”³⁶⁰ for men who might otherwise feel that they have been constrained by the duties that society has placed on them. The ballads,

³⁵⁹ “‘A Wittall Cannot Be a Cookold’ 79

songs and plays that depicted wittols often showed wittols taking back a sense of control and power that had been lost to them.

The wittol can achieve this power and control by coming to an agreement with his wife or his wife's lover. The wittol is being cuckolded, but he gets decide when and how often the lover can visit his wife, dictates what will happen between them, and can cut the relationship off or restart it as he sees fit. This agreement often takes the form of a sort of contract; this contract is sometimes verbal, but can also be a physical document that is signed by all of the participating parties. Some ballads and plays describe this contract as almost lawful, making the agreement between a wittol and his wife or his wife's lover into what Panek's research has found was considered "legitimate and profitable business deal."³⁶¹ In an anonymous ballad called "The Merry Cuckold", the titular cuckold has struck a bargain with his wife: she can spend as much time with her lover as she likes, but she must also milk this lover for money and then give a healthy portion of it to her husband. The narrator argues that being a cuckold does not have to be miserable; if a cuckold sees himself as a wittol and actually agrees to his situation, what others assume to be miserable can actually become extremely profitable. If his wife shames him, he does not need to despair or feel that he is being made a fool of. He is, in fact, perfectly content with everything that his wife is doing:

While she at home
Is taking her pleasure,
Abroad I do roam,
Consuming her treasure.
If all that she gets,

³⁶⁰ Ibid. 68

³⁶¹ Ibid. 76

I share a good share,
She pays all my debts,
Then for what should I care.³⁶²

This situation might be anathema to most early modern men, but the narrator of the poem has fully embraced it: he encourages it, wants it to continue, and has no desire to leave his unfaithful wife. He is getting exactly what he wants out of his wife; he “will not her let”³⁶³ and remove her from his household. The narrator of the poem has nothing to worry about because he is in command of this situation, and he decides how and when it works. He is a good businessman: his debts are paid for, he has an excess amount of leisure time, and he has ample money to spend while he travels wherever he wants. He has not had to actually work for any of this money, and has “taken” all that he has from his wife and her lover. When the narrator claims that he does not “care” about what his wife is doing, he means that he responds to this condition in a completely different way than other men would. It doesn’t matter that the community looks down on him – he is rich and happy. It is notable that “pleasure” and “treasure” are rhymed; in this context, these two words are meant to go together, and it is natural that accumulating wealth is bound up with the sensation of feeling good, even if this means your wife is sleeping with another man.

In “Fortune’s Bounty”, another anonymous poem, I argue that the financially successful cuckold who appears at the end of the poem is actually a wittol. The poem begins with the figure of Fortune deciding that she wants to learn who in England can call himself “the most wretched of mankind.”³⁶⁴ She assumes that this man must be a

³⁶² Anonymous. Printed by the signs of Thomas Symcock, 1629. 25-30

³⁶³ Ibid. 103

³⁶⁴ Printed by the sign by B. Bragge, 1705. 5

cuckold, and she declares that “every horn’d unhappy spouse”³⁶⁵ in the country must report to her hall and tell her about the misery that they have suffered. She plans to award a massive purse to whichever cuckold can prove himself to be the biggest cuckold in the land. This might seem like it would be a miserable and pathetic event, full of painful and traumatic stories. It turns, out, however, that this gathering becomes a “merry time”,³⁶⁶ with Fortune constantly changing her outfits and appearing so spectacular that she “caus’d the cuckolds to adore her.”³⁶⁷ The many cuckolds present, including lawyers, physicians, teachers and clergymen, tell her exaggerated and hyperbolic tales about their adulterous wives, each jockeying for position and trying to come up with the best story.

Fortune, however, is displeased; these cuckolds are much too ashamed of their status, and she commands that “shame let me no more behold.”³⁶⁸ She wants them to be proud and forthright, and to stop squabbling over who is the most miserable. In the end, a “bold Heroick Don”³⁶⁹ strides forward and reports something to Fortune; in the hubbub, no one is able to hear what he says, but Fortune immediately cries out that he “deserv’st the purse.”³⁷⁰ The poem never states exactly what the heroic don told Fortune, but we might speculate it is something very different from what the other cuckolds have narrated; since their stories all involved the despair and misery that they have suffered under their tyrannical, adulterous wives, the don’s report must be the complete opposite. I argue that he revealed himself to be a wittol – a cuckold who is

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 6

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 8

³⁶⁸ Ibid. 17

³⁶⁹ Ibid. 28

unashamed of his status and actively cultivates it for his personal gain. This would fly directly in the face of what every other cuckold reported to Fortune, and, considering the connection between wittols and great financial gain, it would explain why the heroic don wins Fortune's prize purse. He wins the day and walks away with a purse filled with gold, and I submit that this is because he is a wittol who is unashamed of his status and sees no reason to leave his cheating wife.

The one reason that a successful wittol might want to divorce his wife is if she no longer cheats on him, and therefore fails to fulfill her end of their agreement. The point of being a wittol is that your wife cheats on you according to your will; if she stops her cheating, or refuses to cheat, this, and not being cheated on in the first place, is what might ironically prove that a man is impotent and incapable of making firm domestic decisions. Wittols completely reverse the whole idea of male power and control: what was once a sign of weakness becomes, in the hands of the wittol, a sign of dominance. Wittols can only be called weak when they fail to depict themselves as weak, and they are only truly cheated if they are not being cheated on and profiting from that cheating. It is through being cheated on that wittols experience sexual mastery, which means that not being cheated on paradoxically represents their lack of sexual control. When owned by a wittol, the horns of a cuckold even connote what Francisco Vaz de Silva calls a certain "transgressive virility"³⁷¹ that shows how much command and control they have over their sexual lives. Wittols may well want to appear impotent, as this may increase the profits that they gain from their wittolry

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ "Sexual Horns: The Anatomy and Metaphysics of Cuckoldry in European Folklore." Comparative Studies in Society and History 48.2 (2006) 398

(luring more men into attempting to cuckold them), but they can also boast of a certain kind of potency.

The wittols in these ballads were most likely intended to be provocative, and to shock readers with the way that they fly in the face of convention and receive some special gain from a situation that was ordinarily thought of as entirely disastrous. The poems seem to regard the wittol with a kind of distant bemusement; they do not approve of the wittol's way of the life, but they are not exactly critical of it. The wittol inhabits an ambiguous place in these poems, and these figures tend to be described with a certain cautious respect. The reader is never asked to look on a wittol with contempt or disgust; at the same time, this type of lifestyle is never advocated as something that just anyone should try to mimic. The wittol is presented as someone who lives on the fringes, a person who engages in an excitingly taboo behavior, but who is also a familiar figure who the reader might recognize from the world around them. It seems that wittols are so contradictory, so mixed-up and governed by opposing interests, that any depiction of them cannot actually reconcile those contradictions. The reaction that the reader of these ballads is intended to have is extremely hard to determine, and it is likely that they would have been left in a rather confused state: the wittol is at once inviting, attractive, repulsive, frightening, dangerous, intriguing, and both wildly alien and very much familiar.

The Masochistic Wittol

The wittols depicted in poems like "The Merry Cuckold" and "Fortune's Bounty" do not necessarily get sexual pleasure from their experiences, but there is another type of wittol whose erotic life is entirely governed by his status as a cuckold.

This sort of wittol receives pleasure when his wife cheats on him: Gary Kuchar explains that a wittol “pursues his own social castration, secretly delighting in the thought of his own humiliation at the hands of another man.”³⁷² I call this experience masochistic because these wittols find erotic satisfaction in the very places that are most hurtful and humiliating, and in the very situations that society tells them they should not feel good. Their satisfaction, as in masochism, is not random or arbitrary, but is governed by a very precise series of scripts and contracts that the wittol arranges and designs himself. In Jonson’s comedy *Volpone*, the wittol Corvino “sells” a night with his wife to Volpone, and aggressively hints that this exchange “will provide him with licentious pleasure as well as material profit.”³⁷³ He desires to see his wife as a commodity that can be sold,³⁷⁴ and the money that he makes from this deal is secondary to how sexually excited it makes him. He is the one in control of this arrangement – he does not stand idly by and watch while his wife does something without his consent, but supervises and approves every step. Volpone is willing to do business with him, and he does not have to worry about this deal falling through: Corvino is so turned on by the idea of being cuckolded that he will make sure everything goes according to plan. I want to discuss this masochistic breed of wittol for the rest of the chapter; I will first discuss how psychoanalysts think about wittols, and will then do a close reading of Thomas Middleton’s city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. In this play, the character Allwit has lived for years on the bankroll of the pimp and scoundrel Sir Walter Whorehound; in return, Whorehound sleeps with

³⁷² “Rhetoric, Anxiety, and the Pleasures of Cuckoldry in the Drama of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31.1 (2001) 2

³⁷³ Ibid. 5

Allwit's wife, fathers his children, and seems to be the true master of the household. Allwit does not, however, express any despair about his situation – he loves every minute, and could not be happier about the financial and especially erotic gains that he receives from his wittolry.

Psychoanalysis does not use the term “wittol”, but a number of psychoanalytic theorists have written about the idea of a cuckold who enjoys being cuckolded. In Roy Baumeister's study of the social impact of masochism, he describes a cuckold's fantasy: in this scenario, a husband is dressed in women's underwear and spanked by a group of people, and then is tied up and forced to watch while his wife has sex with her lover.³⁷⁵ Baumeister claims that this fantasy features many “different features of masochism”³⁷⁶ such as loss of control, pain, humiliation, etc. But is it still masochism if these different features are stripped away, and all that remains is the cuckolding itself? Baumeister is unsure about this question; he concedes that masochism does not need to be explicitly sexual,³⁷⁷ but does not say whether or not cuckoldry alone can qualify as masochism. I argue that it definitely qualifies as masochism: it thrives on emotional and spiritual tension, it emphasizes staging and role-playing, and it is predicated on the use of a contract to which all parties agree and which dictates how and when the scenario will take place. I hope that I can intervene in psychoanalytic opinions on cuckoldry, and that the argument I am making in this chapter points toward a more expansive definition of masochism and masochistic practices. The

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 7

³⁷⁵ *Escaping the Self: Alcoholism, Spirituality, Masochism, and Other Flights from the Burden of Selfhood*. (New York: Harper, 1991) 118

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. 119

concept of a wittol – a cuckold who wants to be and arranges for himself to be cuckolded – should be classified as a masochistic role.

Allwit of Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* is a powerful example of this masochistic wittol. In Gary Kuchar's reading of the play, he argues that Allwit makes explicit the pleasures of the cuckold that are only implicit in other city comedies,³⁷⁸ luxuriating in the shame that he experiences. The wittols of other comedies and poems do not normally take account of the idea that the situation they are in might make them feel good; Allwit, on the other hand, is completely conscious of this fact, displaying a "self-awareness that his predecessors lacked."³⁷⁹ Allwit is always in complete control of his situation, and is very upfront about how much he wants it to continue. He orders his wife to keep cuckolding him, and arranges an elaborate plot that will make sure that Whorehound will remain his wife's lover. Jennifer Panek argues that Allwit is the ultimate male fantasy: he subverts conventional wisdom about male roles, and "simultaneously evades the responsibility to provide for his household and removes himself from the site of cuckoldry anxiety – he is not jealous precisely because his arrangement allows his wife no scope for sexual disobedience."³⁸⁰ Allwit is, in many ways, the perfect example of the masochistic wittol – completely in control and wildly turned on by the idea of his wife sleeping with another man. He is the sort of figure that I have been building up to discussing all throughout this chapter, and I will demonstrate how deeply he enjoys being a cuckold, how he scripts himself into this role, and how he works to ensure that this situation

³⁷⁸ "Rhetoric, Anxiety, and the Pleasures of Cuckoldry" 25

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 26

³⁸⁰ "A Wittol Cannot Be a Cuckold" 84

will not be obstructed or hindered by any other character in the play.

Allwit's first monologue about life as a wittol is a spectacular example of how prosperous and enjoyable it is to be a humiliated, emasculated cuckold. When Allwit hears that Whorehound is coming to town in order to visit him and his wife, he gleefully exclaims "The Founder's come to town!"³⁸¹ The Founder is a title that Allwit has given Whorehound; Allwit almost worships him, honoring the fact that Whorehound provides for his table and allows him to a life of leisure, and considers him to be the founding force in his masochistic world. Whorehound is less a man and more like a God, a sort of cosmic entity who defines everything about Allwit, how he lives and what he can do:

I am like a man
Finding a table furnished to his hand
As mine is still to me, prays for the Founder
"Bless the Right Worshipful the good Founder's life!"
I thank him, he's maintained my house this ten years;
Not only keeps my wife, but 'a keeps me
And all my family. I am at his table;
He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse
Monthly or weekly; puts me to nothing,
Rent, nor church duties, not so much as the scavenger.
The happiest state that ever man was born to!³⁸²

Whorehound provides for Allwit in every single way, and his family has been completely taken under the pimp and con artist's wing. Allwit is at Whorehound's "table" and not his own, and everything that he eats and partakes of has been provided for him by a more successful, competent, socially powerful man. This is not a fact that fills Allwit with anxiety or that causes him to doubt himself and his role as an early

³⁸¹ English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology, Eds. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Maus, Eric Rasmussen (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002) 1.2.12

³⁸² 1.2.12-22

modern man. He embraces it, and even has a morning prayer with which he thanks and blesses his almost sacred provider. In the meantime, he does not have to spend a cent on anything, and every financial obligation imaginable – the rent for his home, the money he puts in the saucer every Sunday at mass, the spare change he keeps on hand to pay the ironmonger who sells him odds and ends – is handled by Whorehound from afar. Allwit calls this the “happiest state that ever man was born to”, and is overjoyed that he has been placed in such a submissive role. He is not afraid to say that another man has given him the things he owns, and he actively advertises it with pride and self-satisfaction.

The most surprising and perhaps radical thing that Allwit has been given is his children; the group of children being raised and cared for under his roof (a roof that is, admittedly, “maintained” by another man), have all been sired by Whorehound. It is striking that Allwit refers to them as “my children” despite the fact that he is fully aware that Whorehound is their father; he has accepted the responsibility of recognizing them even though he had nothing to do with their birth. This situation is very similar to a common fantasy in contemporary cuckold narratives; in these narratives, the cuckold (or, in more modern terms, the ‘cuck’) “fantasizes about having the woman impregnated by the cuckholder. In these cases, the cuck accepts parental responsibility of the cuckholder’s offspring.”³⁸³ In this scenario, the cuckold enjoys the social shame that comes with raising another man’s children as his own – it shows that he is himself impotent, that he does not have the masculine energy to create a

³⁸³ Kleinplatz, Peggy J. and Charles Moser. “Themes of SM Expression.” *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadoomasochism*. Eds. Darren Langdridge and Meg Barker. (New York: Palgrave, 2007) 49

child in his own right, that he is weak and powerless and that his wife must turn to another man to have children and even to receive sexual gratification. Allwit happily inhabits this role, and does not try to cover it up or hide it from the community: he wears it as a badge of pride. He has not actually suffered the fate of an impotent and helpless husband who must now reconcile himself to raising another man's children, but he is very happy to live as if this is what has happened. Allwit has arranged this role for himself, and he very much wants to live this lifestyle.

Allwit can easily talk about his wife's cheating, and does not feel any shame or anxiety about it. He is even able to calmly and cogently explain that he is a cuckold if he is ever accused of not being a cuckold. When Whorehound visits Cheapside early in the play, he runs into Allwit and asks him how Mistress Allwit is doing. Allwit tells him that his wife is "after your own making, sir. She's a tumbler, i'faith, the nose and belly meets."³⁸⁴ He means that his wife is as ready as ever to receive Whorehound, and that the pimp has made her into a "tumbler": her legs are constantly behind her head, and she is prepared at any moment for a roll in the hay. Whorehound misunderstands Allwit, however, and takes his joke to mean that Allwit has been sleeping with his own wife – a fact that would negate the contract between them. Allwit is specifically not allowed to sleep with Mistress Allwit, and can only serve as her caretaker when Whorehound is not in town. Allwit realizes how his comments might have been interpreted, and starts to sweet-talk Whorehound out of his sudden anger. It is clear that Allwit is the savvy one in this dialogue, and that he is able to manipulate Whorehound with ease; in an aside, Allwit states that "'tis but observing a man's

³⁸⁴ 1.2.76

humor once, and he may ha' him by the nose all his life."³⁸⁵ Panek argues that it is obvious that "Allwit's smiling deference to Whorehound is all a carefully controlled game"³⁸⁶ and that he is never at a loss for what to say or how to react to what Whorehound wants from him. Whorehound may think that he is the one in control of this situation, but he is constantly playing into Allwit's hands. Whorehound is able to think that he is in control because this is the role that Allwit has scripted for him in his erotic drama where he is helpless and impotent and Whorehound is commanding and masterful.

When there is a risk that Whorehound may marry the goldsmith Yellowhammer's daughter, Allwit is stirred to action. If Whorehound becomes legally married and begins to live like a productive member of society, he will no longer visit Mistress Allwit and no longer make Allwit into a cuckold. This is something that Allwit cannot stand for:

I'll stop that gap
Where'er I find it open. I have poisoned
His hopes in marriage already,
Some old rich widows and some landed virgins –
And I'll fall to work still before I lose him.
He's too sweet to part from.³⁸⁷

Allwit works behind the scenes to disrupt any plans that Whorehound has to form an ordinary marriage, and makes sure that the only relationship Whorehound has is with his wife. The idea that Whorehound will get married is a "gap" that Allwit needs to fill; closing up these gaps is what will make Allwit's connection to Whorehound complete. It doesn't matter how Whorehound feels – what matters is that Allwit is able

³⁸⁵ 1.2.88-9

³⁸⁶ "'A Wittall Cannot Be a Cookold' 83

to fulfill his erotic scenario. Whorehound may have mastery in the scenario itself, but Allwit is the one who has mastery over that scenario and who decides whether it will continue or not. Whorehound does not get to stop cuckolding Allwit until Allwit says so, and Allwit does not have any interest in ending this relationship. Whorehound is “sweet” to him because the pimp and conman perfectly embodies the traditional image of the cuckholder that I discussed earlier in this chapter: he is a man who seems to take what he wants, honored by society for his craftiness and ingenuity, exactly the sort of person able to hoodwink an incompetent and impotent husband. Allwit needs Whorehound to keep playing this role, because he is the perfect counterpart to the powerless cuckold Allwit wants to be seen as.

Whorehound, unaware of how deeply he is under Allwit’s thumb, pities the man that he is cuckolding: after speaking to Allwit, he scornfully remarks that “When man turns base, out goes his soul’s pure flame;/The fat of ease o’erthrows the eyes of shame.”³⁸⁷ Whorehound sees Allwit as such a helpless dullard that his ability to see the shameful situation he is in has been irretrievably retarded. Allwit, in Whorehound’s estimation, is not a true man, and his heart has been clouded over by sloth and impotence. Allwit, on the other hand, regards Whorehound as the fool, and feels a bit sorry for him:

In troth, I pity him. He ne’er stands still.
Poor knight, what pains he takes! Sends this way one,
That way another, has not an hour’s leisure.
I would not have thy toil for all thy pleasure.³⁸⁹

In Allwit’s eyes, Whorehound is not experiencing true “pleasure”: the pleasures that

³⁸⁷ 1.2.116-21

³⁸⁸ 2.2.43-4

Whorehound feels require too much “toil”, and Allwit finds this distasteful and ultimately unattractive. Whorehound is the one to be pitied, and not Allwit – the latter is always in control and never out of his comfort zone, while the former is constantly on the move, always toiling away, and never able to actually enjoy himself. Whorehound claims that Allwit’s senses have been dulled by living as a wittol, but the truth is that the latter is completely sharp and aware of what is going on. There is never a moment in the play in which Allwit is fooled, in which someone pulls the wool over his eyes, or in which he does not understand what is happening to him and around him. Allwit is, on the contrary, the most masterful and competent character in the play: he organizes the play’s central romance and constantly subverts Whorehound’s attempts at marriage, all to preserve his status as wittol and to make sure that he can continue to inhabit this erotic role.

Allwit, realizing that Whorehound is beginning to be more trouble than he is worth, ends their partnership by stealing all that he can get from his former patron. Whorehound is, in the end, left penniless; Allwit hoodwinks him, ruining a good marriage prospect and tricking him out of his fortune and property. Whorehound rails wildly at Allwit, accusing him of being “worse than slave or villain”,³⁹⁰ and a bitter “poison to my heart.”³⁹¹ Allwit responds to Whorehound’s accusations with a sarcasm meant to rub in just who is in charge and who has been the more successful member of their partnership. Allwit wryly states that Whorehound has “been somewhat bolder in

³⁸⁹ 2.2.57-60

³⁹⁰ 5.1.21

³⁹¹ 5.1.16

my house/Than I could well like of”³⁹² and asserts that the pimp and con artist is no longer welcome there. Allwit has lost all interest in the man who was once such an important element in his erotic fantasies. If Whorehound has no money and has lost all of his social standing, he is not a suitable cuckold – he is just a loser, broke and without any prospects. Allwit states that since Whorehound is “now to be rid of all”³⁹³ and completely void of all of his money and property, he is “right glad”³⁹⁴ to be “so well rid of him.”³⁹⁵ Allwit, and not Whorehound, had the power to end their relationship whenever he felt like it. Whorehound realizes this much too late – he has, after all, assumed that he was the one duping and exploiting Allwit – and exits the play wounded and dejected.

In all of this, Mistress Allwit is her husband’s equal partner and is pleased with the situation. They have a happy marriage, and the arrangement between them is mutual and free from any tension; Mistress Allwit appreciates her husband’s erotic interests and is pleased to cuckold him, but also continues to respect him as a husband. When Whorehound demands that Mistress Allwit betray her husband and help him in his own backhanded schemes, she sarcastically responds, “Alas, sir, I am one that would have all well,/But must obey my husband.”³⁹⁶ She only cheats on Allwit because he has enlisted her in his erotic game, and she does not actually see him as foolish or impotent. Late in the play, after many of the subplots have been resolved and Whorehound has been ousted from his position as masterful cuckold, Allwit

³⁹² 5.1.157-8

³⁹³ 5.1.167

³⁹⁴ 5.1.167-8

³⁹⁵ 5.1.168

³⁹⁶ 5.1.134-5

and his wife lovingly look over all that they have gained from Whorehound's patronage: Allwit brags that they are "stocked with cloth-of-tissue cushions to furnish out bay windows"³⁹⁷ and enough furniture to "lodge a countess",³⁹⁸ and Mistress Allwit suggests that they rent out rooms in their home and "take a house in the Strand."³⁹⁹ They do not despise each other, feel jealous of each other, or get angry at each other for what has happened with Whorehound; they exchange no insults and reveal no hurt feelings. They plan, instead, to do as they "were wont to do"⁴⁰⁰ before Whorehound – live the life of a traditional married couple, maybe even moving onto a fashionable London street. Allwit and his wife will ultimately look like any other couple, an affectionate pair moving up in the world and accompanied by their many children. There does not seem to be anything unhealthy about their relationship, and it appears that their erotic life is fully scripted, wholly reciprocal and entirely consensual.

What is essential to note about Allwit and wittols like him is that they are very much local figures: these are all English characters enmeshed in English culture, and they are not foreigners with strange values or alien traditions. Middleton's play does not, for instance, take place in a European city or some rural backwater that would not be recognizable to an urban audience; Karen Newman reminds us that the play is set in "the center of commercial London and in perhaps its most prosperous street."⁴⁰¹ These are people that an audience member might know; wittols aren't necessarily Italian

³⁹⁷ 5.1.176-7

³⁹⁸ 5.1.179

³⁹⁹ 5.1.175

⁴⁰⁰ 5.1.172

merchants or French aristocrats, but might be a butcher, a banker, a lawyer, the husband down the street or even one's next-door neighbor. The implication is that masochism is not something that only happens over there, to them and in line with their weird way of life; it can happen right here in England, and it can be practiced by ordinary English people. It turns masochism, or at least the logic of masochism that underwrites wittolry and similar erotic practices, into something familiar. It is true that Allwit is supposed to be surprising, subversive and a bit ridiculous, but he is also successful, happy and in control of his own life. Masochism does not need to be a wild and mysterious experience that destroys someone's life and defines everything about the way that they relate to the world: it can be ordinary or even boring. These depictions of wittols might have been one of the first, though perhaps accidental, attempts at normalizing a sexual fetish and depicting an erotic lifestyle as something less than aberrant and that any member of an audience or reader of a pamphlet might actually be able to partake of themselves. These texts argue that wittolry might be strange or undesirable, but that such a lifestyle has its own pleasures, benefits and values.

Wittols, in other words, demonstrate that masochism can be English. Your neighbors might be masochists, or are at least able to recognize the logic of masochistic pleasure in the people around them. In my last chapter, I will elaborate more on these specifically English instances of masochism. I argue that a number of English texts depict a masochism that actually reaches out to the audience and the reader, creating a masochistic dynamic between the people reading or watching and

⁴⁰¹ "'Goldsmith's ware': Equivalence in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*." Huntington Library Quarterly

the text itself. I will show how plays and poems are able to insult, ridicule and abuse their audience while also encouraging them to continue watching or reading, and I argue it is no coincidence that these texts were so immensely popular and successful. I will focus on Ben Jonson's city comedy *Bartholomew Fair*, which depicts a popular local fair filled with con artists, grifters and scammers; the play actually imagines itself as one of those con artists, and casts the audience as the rubes that it is going to sucker. This relationship is made masochistic by the play's induction, which presents the audience with a special contract that they are asked to sign before the play begins: the viewers must take in and take on all that the play wants to give them, and they are legally bound to enjoy it. If they do not enjoy this abuse and complain about it later, they will have broken the terms of the contract and will have failed to fulfill their end of the masochistic bargain.

CHAPTER IV

Insulting the audience and masochistic spectatorship in *Bartholomew Fair*

Critics of early modern drama are traditionally attuned to the twists and turns of dramatic language, focusing in on the social, cultural, and political implications of a given play's dialogue. What does it mean that a particular character's dialogue always includes an enjambment? What indecorous desires are concealed in the character's seemingly chaste and poetic remarks? This attention to character and language is one of the great strengths of early modern scholarship, but the intensity of that attention has led critics to regularly ignore one of the most important figures in any drama: the audience. Jennifer Low and Nova Myhill argue that audience reaction has "been curiously set apart from the experience of the drama of the period"⁴⁰² and is not always taken into account when scholars are analyzing a dramatic work. In this chapter, I want to turn to the audience and how audience members relate to the plays that they watch. I am especially interested in plays that insult and abuse their audience. Many early modern plays, especially city comedies, regularly insulted and ridiculed the audiences that came to see them, informing them that they were uncultured, foolish, and ignorant. This was not, however, always a bad thing – these same plays were also extremely popular, and people were willing to pay for a ticket in order to be subjected to this treatment. If audiences were constantly asked, as Theodore Levinwand claims, to "question their adequacy"⁴⁰³ and think of themselves as ridiculous and incompetent, it seems that the play-going residents of early modern London were able

⁴⁰² *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558-1642*. Eds. Low, Jennifer A. and Nova Myhill. (New York: Palgrave, 2011) 1

to see all of this vitriol as a fine source of entertainment.

Why should this be what audiences desire? What would have been appealing about spending your afternoon getting called a fool? I argue that the masochistic structures that I have analyzed throughout this project do not need to be restricted to the stage. The members of an audience can, themselves, have a masochistic relationship with the stage, with the play, with the characters that they are watching and listening to, and even with the actors and playwrights that created those characters. The theater itself might even be a masochistic location, and someone might go to a play in the hopes of being pick-pocketed or accosted by a pimp or some other unsavory figure; to thrill at the danger of catching the plague; or, as I will argue here, to be abused, insulted and humiliated by a play that they have paid good money to see. If the audience asks to be abused, if the audience pays for the experience of being insulted, does this mean that they have authority in the theater? If the actors and playwrights are the ones doing the insulting and abusing, does this mean that they only have control at the pleasure of the audience? If we consider these questions in a masochistic light, it is the audience that has control. The balance of power in this dynamic is very similar to the structure of a masochistic scenario: audience members pay to participate in a situation in which they will be humiliated, and they are ultimately in control of their own abuse. When audience members pay to enter a playhouse, they also enter into a sort of contract: they agree to observe the play that is going to be performed for them, but that play must be performed in a particular way and satisfy certain conditions in order to earn any applause.

⁴⁰³ *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press,

In this chapter, I will focus on the question of what it means to be a masochistic spectator. I will pursue this question through a close reading of a city comedy that is especially interested in its audience and how that audience is watching the play: Ben Jonson's acerbic *Bartholomew Fair*, a sharp-tongued and mean-spirited account of con artists and the marks that they prey on. The play seems, at first, to be more a work of sadism than a document of masochism. The grifters and con artists who populate the play exploit anyone and everyone they can, and are merciless in the way that they needle, provoke, and venomously ridicule anyone who they think is stupider than them, less hip than them, or socially and culturally beneath them. The attitude that these characters have toward anyone that they perceive as inferior is similar to the attitude displayed by Jonson and the members of his inner circle. Jonson headed his own group of poets and playwrights: a collection of drinkers, wits, and fellow travelers who mercilessly cut down anyone who was not a member of their circle. Jonson's friends style themselves as the only people who actually understand how the world works, and they view the rest of humanity as ignorant and foolish. These writers, like the con artist characters in *Bartholomew Fair*, find a sadistic glee in manipulating and insulting all of the foolish sheep who are too simple-minded to comprehend what is being said to them. *Bartholomew Fair*'s Winwife and Quarlous spend the play prowling after husbands to cuckold and marks to hoodwink, and in the meantime turn their bitter barbs on characters like the helplessly idiotic Cokes and cowardly Littlewit. This sadistic behavior is their right, because they are superior to the masses that surround them.

The audience was not safe from *Bartholomew Fair*'s insults; in fact, the play spends much of its comic energy on social satire that lampoons anyone who might be watching it. The play is one of Jonson's nastiest critiques of English culture, and just about everyone comes in for some degree of mockery and abuse: locals, out-of-towners, merchants, customers, government officials, preachers, husbands, wives, and pretty much anybody that could be found walking out on an average London street. Jonson was notorious for hating his audiences, and Jennifer Low and Nova Myhill observe that he expresses a "perennial dissatisfaction"⁴⁰⁴ with the people who read and see his work; Jonson seems perpetually bitter about the fact that he has to present his work before anyone at all. He has many poems that taunt and outright mock the person reading them, and his plays are filled with offensive caricatures that are primed to belittle and demean half of the patrons sitting or standing in the audience. Jonson, in order to make sure that *Bartholomew Fair*'s audience does not complain about being mocked, begins his play with a rather unique induction; in this opening scene, actors playing the crew and producers of the play make a contract with the audience, getting them to promise that they will remember their place and not complain too much about what they see and hear. It appears that Jonson's goal with this contract is to wrest control of the stage back for the players, and to remind the audience that having paid for admission does not make them experts and does not make their opinion really mean anything. Jonson, it would seem, does not appreciate the idea that his play might be criticized or commented on by the unwashed locals that he so despised.

⁴⁰⁴ *Imagining the Audience* 6

This all makes it seem like *Bartholomew Fair* is a sadistic play: Winwife, Quarlous and other con artists torment the fair's unsuspecting marks, and Jonson torments an audience that has paid good money to be insulted and told how worthless and inadequate they all. If we look at the play from a different perspective, however, we will find that it is a deeply masochistic work. This sense of masochism is not necessarily reflected in the action on the stage, but in the relationship between the action on the stage and the audience that is watching and responding to it. I argue that there is a masochistic character to the contract with the audience in the induction, and that this contract creates a masochistic link between the play and the audience. This play offers us, then, an example of masochistic spectatorship; the audience that comes to *Bartholomew Fair* has paid to be insulted and treated like ignorant commoners, and if they are mocked and lampooned by the play, then this is precisely what they have come to experience. The induction's contract demands that the audience does not complain when the play insults them, and orders them to remember their place and not think that they actually know anything about what a play is or how the theater works. It may seem, at first, that the audience suffers because of this contract; they are coerced into obediently sitting and watching a play that will repeatedly mock and ridicule them, and they are even denied the ability to speak up and say anything about how they are being treated. This is, however, exactly how a masochistic contract works; the masochist who seems to be trapped and placed in a position of shame and pain has actually put himself there, and he has designed this shame and pain for himself. The audience of *Bartholomew Fair* may not have personally written the contract that they sign, but the contract's language and logic evokes all of the

structures of masochism. If both the audience and the playwright agree to sign this contract, this means that the former agrees to be insulted and the latter agrees to do the insulting. This event is not random or chaotic, and it cannot simply happen at any time; like masochism, the insults in this play can only occur when the audience has responded in a certain way or expressed itself in a manner that matches the terms outlined in the induction's contract.

It is difficult to argue that audiences actually understood that they were participating in a masochistic contract. I do not want to claim that every person in the audience was interested in this masochistic dynamic, or that they were even aware that such a dynamic was present or possible. It is impossible, of course, to try and assert anything about what these people were thinking or how they felt about what they watched. What I want to focus on instead is the play itself, and to notice what kind of dynamic it tries to create between the stage and the audience. The induction's contract creates the conditions for a masochistic relationship, and it establishes all of the elements that are important to masochistic desire. In this chapter, I will discuss how the induction does this work, and what it means to be a masochistic spectator. I will begin with a reading of the play itself, analyzing how its con artist character like Quarlous and Winwife exploit, cheat, and mock the weaker fairgoers like Cokes and Littlewit. I will then discuss the play's attitude toward its audience; in a sense, the play treats its audience much like Quarlous and Winwife treat Cokes and Littlewit, taunting and insulting them as ignorant and inferior. This section of the chapter will also include some background on Jonson's own thoughts about the early modern audience, and about how he and the members of his inner circle wrote about and regarded

ordinary people. These sections will make it seem that *Bartholomew Fair* is an incredibly sadistic play, reveling in the idea of tormenting and ridiculing anyone that its author does not like, whether that be a character like Cokes or an actual member of the audience. I will ultimately argue, in the chapter's final section, that this is actually a deeply masochistic play, and that we can see how this dynamic works by looking closely at the play's induction and the curious contract that it presents to the audience. I claim that this contract is a masochistic document that radically redefines what it means to watch a play, and that it offers its audience an entirely new way to get pleasure when they come to the theater.

***Bartholomew Fair* and the Culture of Nastiness**

Bartholomew Fair is governed by a sharp-toothed logic in which the strong prey on the weak, and in which the weak deserve it because they do not have the urbane attitude and street smarts of the strong who exploit them. These con artists are smarter and smoother than the average person: they know what to say and when to say it, and they deserve to take from people who do not know what to say and when to say it. Quarlous and Winwife are the most prominent predators in the play; they are constantly on the make, trying to figure out what they can get and who they can get it out of. The two of them are notorious skirt chasers, and they are happy to cuckold whoever they can. Littlewit, one of the play's many marks, is one of their main targets, as they both have their eye on his attractive, young wife Win. Littlewit assures his wife that there is "no harm"⁴⁰⁵ in the leering, lusty Winwife, and he allows the roguish con artist to kiss her without understanding Winwife's obscene intentions. In

the next scene, Quarlous demands that Win “come hither”⁴⁰⁶ and kiss him; when she rejects his advances, he retorts that “we’ll kiss again and fall in”,⁴⁰⁷ the idea of “falling in” being early modern shorthand for having sex. When Win protests to her husband, yelling “Do you see this, John? Look you! Help me, John!”,⁴⁰⁸ he is not impressed, and does not see any cause for concern; he begs her not to be so “womanly”⁴⁰⁹ and such a crybaby, and he claims that she “must not quarrel with”⁴¹⁰ Quarlous and Winwife. Win scoffs, and calls her husband a “fool”⁴¹¹ for letting these men be so familiar with her. He responds by laughing at her, and turns to Quarlous and Winwife, amused that his own wife has called him a fool: “A fool-John she calls me. Do you mark that, gentlemen?”⁴¹² Littlewit is the perfect mark: compliant and oblivious. He is not a knowing cuckold, and his name alone makes him a perfect contrast with Allwit from *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*; Allwit has the wit to know that he is a cuckold, and is in completely control of his situation, while Littlewit has no wit at all and has no idea what Quarlous and Winwife want to do with his wife.

Quarlous and Winwife enjoy mocking and exploiting anyone who they see as inferior to them. The two have a good laugh when they meet Cokes, who Adam Zucker refers to as a “flighty, naïve, and deeply impressionable out-of-towner”,⁴¹³ fascinated by everything he sees and completely oblivious to the way that life in the

⁴⁰⁵ *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, Eds. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Maus, Eric Rasmussen (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002) 1.2.10

⁴⁰⁶ 1.3.36-7

⁴⁰⁷ 1.3.50

⁴⁰⁸ 1.3.38-9

⁴⁰⁹ 1.3.40

⁴¹⁰ 1.3.48

⁴¹¹ 1.3.52

⁴¹² 1.3.53-4

⁴¹³ *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 82

city works. When the two con artists meet Cokes, a stage direction follows that reads “*Quarlous and Winwife confer aside.*”⁴¹⁴ This is the general method that this duo uses throughout the play: they encounter someone who they might be able to exploit, move off to the side, and then discuss how to best go about their scam. Winwife looks at Cokes, and then asks Quarlous if he ever saw “a fellow’s face more accuse him for an ass?”⁴¹⁵ Quarlous immediately responds, “Accuse him? It confesses him one without accusing.”⁴¹⁶ When the two have seen adequate evidence of Cokes’ ignorance and childishness, and have realized that he has money to spend and no ability to properly take care of it, the play delivers another stage direction that reads “*Quarlous and Winwife confer privately.*”⁴¹⁷ The point is clear: we’ve found our prey, the hunt is on, and let’s talk about how to best go about our work. Winwife suggests that the two of them put aside all of their other schemes for the day, because Cokes will surely “engender us excellent creeping sport”⁴¹⁸ and be a perfect person to cheat out of his money and possessions. It doesn’t really belong to him, anyway; such things should go to the smarter and sharper, who actually deserve them. The only question is what Quarlous and Winwife will enjoy more: keeping whatever they take from Cokes, or seeing his buffoonish and ridiculous reaction when he realizes that he has been robbed.

Quarlous and Winwife wait for Cokes to show up at the local fair, anticipating the moment when they can take advantage of some weakness or confusion and get

⁴¹⁴ 1.5.47

⁴¹⁵ 1.5.48-9

⁴¹⁶ 1.5.50-1

⁴¹⁷ 1.5.133

⁴¹⁸ 1.5.138-9

something out of the gullible young man. While they are waiting, they casually insult and mock any of the salespeople who offer them a bauble or any passing fairgoer who gets in their way. Winwife complains that “these people should be so ignorant”⁴¹⁹ and considers interacting with this crowd to be an “inconvenience.”⁴²⁰ When another character notices his haughty behavior and asks whether or not Winwife is “proud,”⁴²¹ the latter responds that he is not proud “of the company I am in, sir, nor the place, I assure you.”⁴²² Quarlous and Winwife eventually turn their acerbic wit on Ursula, a tapster who is singled out for her obesity. Quarlous jokes that her thick hide would “make excellent gear for the coach-makers,”⁴²³ and he claims that having sex with her would be like “falling into a whole shire of butter.”⁴²⁴ Winwife calls her the “Mother o’the Furies”⁴²⁵ and observes that with every second her “language grows greasier than her pigs.”⁴²⁶ Quarlous is especially eager to keep up the verbal assault: he calls her a “bog”⁴²⁷ and a “quagmire,”⁴²⁸ laughs at “how she drips”⁴²⁹ sweat on the ground, and he calls her a “walking sow,”⁴³⁰ in other words, a cow who can stand up on two legs. Quarlous and Winwife get so caught up in mocking Ursula that they completely miss the arrival of Cokes, and are not around to see Cokes getting robbed by another of the play’s con artists. Quarlous states that he and Winwife have had “wonderful ill

⁴¹⁹ 2.5.12

⁴²⁰ 2.5.29

⁴²¹ 2.5.52

⁴²² 2.5.53-4

⁴²³ 2.5.78

⁴²⁴ 2.5.97

⁴²⁵ 2.5.74

⁴²⁶ 2.5.130

⁴²⁷ 2.5.89

⁴²⁸ 2.5.88

⁴²⁹ 2.5.108

⁴³⁰ 2.5.75-6

luck to miss”⁴³¹ this chance at getting their hands on what Cokes has, but the truth is that the two of them are more interested in making fun of other people than they are in actually getting some money out of their schemes. Quarlous states that the robbery was merely a “prologue”⁴³² and that what will actually be enjoyable is the scene that Cokes will make when he realizes that he has been robbed and starts to call for help. Quarlous assures Winwife that this will be “spectacle enough,”⁴³³ and that the two of them should not care about missing out on getting some cash. The young man’s fright and helplessness will be all the profit that they need.

This makes it seem that *Bartholomew Fair* is a document of sadism: these characters are more interested in causing someone else pain and discomfort than in getting a financial reward for themselves. The characters that they prey on and mock, like the oblivious cuckold Littlewit or idiotic Cokes, have no idea what is happening to them. Littlewit and Cokes are not masochists, and do not arrange for Quarlous and Winwife to cheat and humiliate them; they do not have any control or say over their situation, and we do not see any scenes that suggest Littlewit or Cokes receive any pleasure from being ridiculed and exploited. If characters in the play do willingly undergo the experience of pain or humiliation, it is not for their own pleasure or erotic benefit. Local judge Justice Overdo, who feels that he needs to enforce the law at the fair, goes undercover “in the habit of a fool”⁴³⁴ in order to discover the criminal “enormities”⁴³⁵ that will surely take place there. He realizes that this is going to be a

⁴³¹ 3.2.1

⁴³² 3.2.2

⁴³³ 3.2.3

⁴³⁴ 2.1.9

⁴³⁵ 2.1.40

difficult project, but he claims that it is “for the public good”⁴³⁶ and that whatever discomfort he feels or embarrassment he undergoes will be worth it. Overdo is willing to go through whatever happens to him, “come beating, come imprisonment, come infamy, come banishment, nay, come the rack.”⁴³⁷ This does not benefit him at all, but it is all for the “good purposes”⁴³⁸ of bettering the community and fishing out sin and crime wherever he can find it. Overdo is later on beaten by a group of fairgoers, who see him as a foolish meddler, and he admits that he “deserved this beating”⁴³⁹ and that he was the “one cause”⁴⁴⁰ of what happened. This entire sub-plot is completely opposed to the idea of a masochistic narrative: Overdo acknowledges that he has orchestrated all of this himself and takes complete credit for his beating. He doesn’t feign ignorance or act like he is helpless, and he does not claim that this beating and embarrassment makes him feel good. If he were a masochist, he would insist that he is not at fault, that he has been beaten without any good reason, and that he has had no part to play in organizing what happened to him. He is, instead, upfront about his involvement, readily admits that he is doing this for the community and not himself, and, by the end of the play, has been beaten and harassed so many times that he regrets that he ever had the bright idea to put this disguise on.

Bartholomew Fair does not appear to have any conception of masochism. It seems that the governing logic of the play is sadism, and that everyone in the play is steeped in that logic to some degree. The characters participate in a pervasive culture

⁴³⁶ 2.1.10

⁴³⁷ 3.3.36-7

⁴³⁸ 3.3.14

⁴³⁹ 3.3.4

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

of nastiness, mocking each other, beating each other, and trying find out how to exploit one another; that is, of course, when they are not running for cover and trying to avoid anyone who might exploit them. If this is so, how and where can we find masochism in this play? How can this be called a masochistic work? I argue that the play's primary masochistic relationship is between the play and the audience that watches it. The play insults its own audience members – it baits them, taunts them, mocks them, and reminds them that they are inferior and ridiculous. It develops these insults into a masochistic dynamic by opening the play with a contract that the audience must agree to before the action of the play can properly begin; by agreeing to this contract, the audience will promise to remain silent and obedient, will not complain when they are insulted and mocked, and will not profess that they know better than the play's author or that, even, they know anything at all. In the next section, I will discuss Jonson's tempestuous relationship with his audience and readers; he was notorious for his contempt of everyone who came to see his plays or read his poems, and his inner circle of cronies and fellow poets showed a similar contempt for their own audiences. I will build on this background to show how *Bartholomew Fair*'s harsh treatment of its audience echoes Jonson's bitterness, and how the play's vicious and scornful comments recall Jonson's disdain for the population of early modern London. I will finally turn to the play's induction and the masochistic contract that it makes with the audience, explaining how the play sets up this masochistic dynamic and what it means to be a masochistic spectator.

Jonson and the Early Modern Audience

The attitude displayed by Quarlous, Winwife, and *Bartholomew Fair*'s other

con artists evokes the supercilious cliquishness practiced by Ben Jonson himself and the circle of friends that he drank and fraternized with. The group included poets and playwrights like Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, John Suckling, Edmund Waller and Thomas Randolph, and would gather at local bars like the Mermaid Tavern, toasting one another and boasting about how much better they were than the people in the outside world. Jonson's group posited that social success required an acute sense of one's surroundings, of noticing the dress, mannerisms and actions of other people. If one is attuned to them, one can see the small details of social life. Lorna Hutson calls these moments the "'close-ups' of social exchange"⁴⁴¹ and she claims that Jonson and his group are experts at finding and analyzing those moments; she asserts that their poetry and plays demonstrate a keen sense of surveillance and a particular "sharpness of observation."⁴⁴² Michelle O'Callaghan observes that the group honed this skill "not simply through ways of seeing, but also through hearing"⁴⁴³ the minor inflections of speech that differentiated people from one another. Jonson's circle realized, however, that others could see and hear them in return; Katherine Maus argues, in her influential book on Jonson, that the observations he makes in his poetry and plays take on a "paranoid form, a defense of the self against constant threats of incursion or disruption."⁴⁴⁴ Lorna Hutson develops this insight by arguing that the poetry produced by Jonson's circle demonstrates that its members can "internalize and anticipate

⁴⁴¹ "Civility and Virility in Ben Jonson." *Representations* 78 (2002) 18

⁴⁴² Ibid. 8

⁴⁴³ *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) 47

⁴⁴⁴ *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984) 17

everyone else's indifferent or hostile observations,"⁴⁴⁵ giving them the advantage. This defensiveness enables them to present themselves as the height of urbane cultivation, as intelligent, quick-witted gentlemen who know how and when to adjust their language, dress and manners to the proper and decorous register, and how to shut down anyone that might seem like a threat to them.

It then becomes important for these poets to define themselves against those who are supposedly inferior to them. If someone is different, that person must be one of the unwashed, stupid or immoral masses that populate the streets and alehouses. Maus argues that Jonson's group follows the classical moralists in splitting "humanity into two groups: the depraved majority against an elite class of wise and virtuous men."⁴⁴⁶ Jonson and his circle are, of course, the latter, upholders of humanistic virtue and moral authority in the midst of a sea of ignorance. The circle articulates its difference from others in terms that are condescending, contemptuous and at times brutal. The masses are, to begin with, "bacon-brains,"⁴⁴⁷ "loose idolaters,"⁴⁴⁸ and possessed of a "deep and arrant ignorance,"⁴⁴⁹ but this is tame compared to some of their other comments. Herrick's "The Hock-Cart, or Harvest Home," written for his friend and fellow circle member Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, is a poem of instruction that is addressed to Fane's peasants. Herrick reminds these peasants to feed their cows (or "neats") as if they were feeding themselves: "Feed, and grow fat; and as

⁴⁴⁵ "Civility and Virility" 10

⁴⁴⁶ *Roman Frame of Mind* 131

⁴⁴⁷ Randolph, Thomas. "An Answer to Mr. Ben Jonson's Ode, to Persuade Him Not to Leave the Stage," *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets* 13

⁴⁴⁸ Shirley, James. "To His Honored Friend Thomas Stanley Esquire, upon His Elegant Poems," *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets* 17

⁴⁴⁹ Herrick, Robert. "Upon Master Ben Jonson: Epigram," *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets* 14

ye eat,/Be mindful that the lab'ring neat,/As you, may have their fill of meat.”⁴⁵⁰ The peasants are as much farm animals as the cows that they tend to, feeding and growing fat to be strong enough for the labor to come. If this is only implied in Herrick's poem, Jonson is much less understated in his language. In an epithalamion honoring two aristocrats, he states this about the unwashed masses: “Th'ignoble never lived; they were a while,/Like swine or other cattle, here on earth.”⁴⁵¹ These people are simple beasts, meant for labor and food, incapable of higher thought and focused on purely animalistic desires. Jonson's circle, on the other hand, is made up of full-fledged human beings, and its members have the right to ride, use and eat these animals as they see fit. In these poems, one can sense what Lorna Hutson refers to as an “exchange of knowing smiles,”⁴⁵² a shared contempt for the masses that reaffirms their own elite status and reasserts just how different they are from the herd that surrounds them.

Jonson, in particular, was not coy about telling his audiences and readers that they should feel like dirt, and that they should recognize their inferior status. He regularly complained about the fact that his plays were performed for the ignorant masses, and not, in Adam Zucker's astute words, “a clamoring crowd of witty critics”⁴⁵³ who would understand all of his classical allusions and sympathize with his elitist characters. Jonson did not present his plays to the sort of disaffected, scholarly, and sharp-tongued classical moralists who he modeled himself after and who he

⁴⁵⁰ Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets 44-6

⁴⁵¹ “Epithalamion, or a Song Celebrating the Nuptials of that Noble Gentleman, Mr. Jerome Watson, Lord High Treasurer of England, with the Lady Frances Stuart, Daughter of Esme Duke of Lennox, Deceased, and Sister of the Surviving Duke of the Same Name,” Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets 153-4

depicted with such admiring flattery in his Roman tragedies. His audience was, instead, the real, smelly, uneducated, and boorish population of early modern London, and Jonson bitterly recognized the gap between the audience of his fantasy and the audience that actually came (or, quite often, did not come) to his plays. He was annoyed with the playgoers that turned up to see his caustic comedies full of obscure references, but he was even more annoyed when people did not show up. There was nothing that the audience could do to please him, and everything they did was evidence of their stupidity and inadequacy. He did not, therefore, mince words when this London audience again and again failed to match up to his classical ideal.

Jonson took every opportunity he could to remind his readers and viewers that they were more than lacking. Jonson did limit his bitterness to comments in his own poems and plays; if given the opportunity, he was happy to vent his feelings whenever he could, and he would criticize and ridicule early modern audiences in whatever forum was available to him. When John Fletcher's proto-tragicomedy *The Faithful Shepherdess* was printed in quarto after an unsuccessful theatrical run, Jonson wrote a commendatory poem that condemned audiences for their lack of taste and their inability to recognize the worth of such a great and original play:

I, that am glad, thy innocence was thy guilt,
And wish that all the muses' blood was spilt,
In such martyrdom; to vex their eyes,
Do crown thy murdered poem: which shall rise
A glorified work to time, when fire,
Or moths shall eat, what all these fools admire.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² "Liking Men: Ben Jonson's Closet Opened." *ELH* 71.4 (2004) 1082

⁴⁵³ *The Places of Wit* 101

⁴⁵⁴ "To Mr. Fletcher, Upon His Faithful Shepherdess," *The Works of Ben Jonson* (Boston: Philips, Sampson, and Co., 1853) 815 11-16

The audience, too stupid to appreciate Fletcher's play (which, to be fair, is extremely didactic and often quite boring), deserves to be blinded by a jet of blood. The play has been "murdered" by these inattentive, uneducated, confused Londoners, and they must be punished. The people who did not see this play are guilty, and Jonson sets himself up as judge and jury. He declares that everything that these ignorant "fools" love will ultimately be destroyed by the whims of time, and that the greatness of Fletcher's play will, almost spitefully, rise back up and survive long after everything that they care about. The irony of Jonson's vitriol is, of course, the fact that whoever reads this poem has actually bought a quarto copy of the play, and this should mean that they are not amongst the fools that Jonson is abusing. Jonson does not give the reader any special treatment or congratulate him for having bought this play when so many ignored it on the stage. Francis Beaumont's commendatory poem in this same quarto is even harsher, accusing its readers of being barely able to read (even though they are reading the very poem that insults them), and lumps them in with the uneducated philistines who caused the production to fail in the first place. Beaumont claims that when one of these ignorant Londoners buys and reads this play, that local idiot's "very reading makes verse senseless prose"⁴⁵⁵ and completely desecrates a work of art. It seems like almost no one is safe from these bitter barbs delivered by these writers – not even the very audience members and readers that they relied on to pay for their plays and poems, and to make them socially and financially successful.

In the end, *Bartholomew Fair* might stand as Jonson's most sour comment on English life and his contempt for his audience. The play savagely mocks just about

⁴⁵⁵ "To My Friend Mr. John Fletcher, Upon His Faithful Shepherdess," The Poems of Francis Beaumont

every member of the community, from the religious (lambasted as “right hypocrites, good gluttons”⁴⁵⁶) to local shopkeepers (they are “rotten, rougey cheaters!”⁴⁵⁷). One character claims that the only type of people you will find walking the streets of the city are “a scattered covey of fiddlers, or one of these rag-rakers in dunghills, or some marrowbone-man”,⁴⁵⁸ and another asserts that people who attend plays, shows, bearbaitings, and other public entertainments are a “debauched company”⁴⁵⁹ of criminals, scam artists, and ignorant losers. The play opines that too many people “slavereth” after ale and that tobacco causes them to “stinketh”,⁴⁶⁰ and finds that at any large gathering of people you are sure to be bombarded with putrid breath that comes from a diet of “stale bread, rotten eggs, musty ginger, and dead honey.”⁴⁶¹ People with wealth and fancy coaches are “as common as wheelbarrows where there are great dunghills”,⁴⁶² and the customers at a marketplace are “a kind o’civil savages, that will part with their children for rattles, pipes, and knives.”⁴⁶³ There is no one that gets away easy here, and it seems that everyone, from every walk of life, is called out as presumptuous, unlearned, and ridiculous. There is enough material here for just about anyone who watches or reads this play to be offended by it; the old, the young, the rich, the poor, men, women, people who go to plays, and people who do not go to plays are all derided with a scornful intensity that cannot be brushed off as merely playful. When Quarlous condemns a group of people at the fair as “a herd of

(Oxford: Oxford UP, 1940) 34

⁴⁵⁶ *Bartholomew* 3.2.120-1

⁴⁵⁷ 2.5.101

⁴⁵⁸ 1.3.4-7

⁴⁵⁹ 3.5.3

⁴⁶⁰ 2.6.88-9

⁴⁶¹ 2.2.9-10

⁴⁶² 4.5.96-7

hypocritical proud ignorants”,⁴⁶⁴ it is difficult to not see this as a reference to the audience that is actually watching the play (a reading that is compounded by the fact that crowds were so often referred to as a bovine herd or a multi-headed animal made up of parts that cannot think for themselves).

The most mocked and abused character in the play is Cokes. He enjoys things too much, is far too trusting, and does not have the tools for surviving an afternoon at the crowded, quick-moving marketplace. He shows his purse to passing shoppers, practically asking to get robbed by any nearby thief, and he buys whatever cheap trinkets and toys that he can, interested in even the most tacky tchotchkes and shoddily-made baubles. Cokes has lost most of his money by the end of the play and cannot find anyone who will help him out of his situation. He winds up tricked, cheated, and exploited by almost everyone at the fair, and is made into a complete fool. Cokes is left completely stunned by his downfall, and wanders the streets of the fair, asking strangers “do you know who I am, or where I lie?”⁴⁶⁵ When Cokes is at last rescued by his flustered caretaker, he decides to attend the fair’s puppet show, a comic adaptation of the Hero and Leander fable. He makes foolish comments about the show, idiotically repeating lines and only barely understanding what is happening. The classical allusions and political satire are completely lost on him, and he is entirely awed by the fact that puppets are moving and talking (even though, as Heather Easterling’s research has shown, puppet shows were “a popular and ubiquitous

⁴⁶³ 3.4.32-4

⁴⁶⁴ 5.1.42-3

⁴⁶⁵ *Bartholomew* 4.2.79

entertainment in Jacobean London”,⁴⁶⁶ and should not have seemed quite so fascinating). Cokes does not have many expectations for this performance; he only wants to see, as his fellow theatergoer Knockem puts it, “fine fireworks, and good vapors”,⁴⁶⁷ a spectacle that will hold his interest for an hour and change before he grows bored and wanders back off into the fair. He has no idea what he is watching, and cannot begin to appreciate the history behind it.

Cokes, it would appear, represents the theater audience that Jonson so despised. He is gullible, childish, and easily entertained by anything flashy; it does not take much work to persuade him that something is good, as long as it is big, bold, and cartoonish. In his childish trust, he is willing to spend his money on whatever has the best advertisements or asks for his coins with the most convincing bombast. He has no taste, no understanding of history, no discernment, and no idea of what actually makes for a quality piece of entertainment. Cokes does not understand the culture of the theater, he does not follow particular playwrights that produce good work, he does not even know how to behave when he watches a play. He is exactly the kind of reader and audience member that Jonson hated so much: he has no education, no wit, and no class, but he has just enough money to attend the theater and spoil the whole thing for everybody else. This is compounded by the fact that Cokes is completely oblivious to how ridiculous and offensive he is, and he thinks he is doing absolutely nothing wrong by shouting imbecilic comments at the stage. Jonson resented that he had to share his work with these customers, and he was never shy about expressing his hostility. The

⁴⁶⁶ *Parsing the City: Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, and City Comedy's London as Language*. (New York: Routledge, 2007) 126

⁴⁶⁷ *Bartholomew* 5.4.25

image that the play offers of its theatergoing audience is profoundly negative and insulting. The implication is that the people who come to see plays, even the very people sitting in the audience and watching this one, are no better than Cokes or the many other idiots who sound like him.

The Induction as a Masochistic Contract

If Jonson's intention is to humiliate his audience and remind them of how stupid they are, it would seem that he succeeds: *Bartholomew Fair* is unsparing in its vicious and sharp-tongued appraisal of anyone who does not meet Jonson's standards (and this, it appears, includes everyone in the audience). Everything about the play, and everything about the way that Jonson talks about his audience at any opportunity he can find, suggests that *Bartholomew Fair* is a profoundly sadistic document. The characters in the play are nasty to anyone who is weaker than them or supposedly inferior to them, the play itself indirectly insults the audience watching it, and Jonson clearly held everyone who attended his plays in great contempt. Jonson despised his audiences so much that he was upset about the fact that these people thought they had any agency or control over their experience of a play. He chafed against the convention that plays had to ask an audience for approval, and that a play's merit was based entirely on the amount of applause that an audience gave to it at the end. Heather Easterling claims that Jonson constantly tried his best to wrest control of the stage back to him and his plays, and that many of his plays show an unwillingness to admit that audience members had any authority in the theater.⁴⁶⁸ Jonson wanted to put audiences in their place, and remind them who was truly in control. He takes this

⁴⁶⁸ *Parsing the City* 113

sadistic attitude toward his audience one step further with *Bartholomew Fair*'s induction. The induction proposes a special contract between the stage and the audience. The contract seems to take away all of an audience member's power; it prevents him from complaining; it forces him to remain quiet; and it even demands his approval whether he actually likes the play or not. If the audience is going to watch the play, all of its members must agree to listen respectfully, to not claim that they know better than the playwright, and to remember that they are ultimately insignificant and ignorant next to this learned play and its learned creator.

This might seem like Jonson's most precise act of sadism yet: you must sit in silence while you are insulted, and you do not have the right to react or be offended. However, if we closely read the dynamic that the induction creates between the stage and its audience, I argue that this contract gives the entire play a sharply masochistic character. The contract establishes a masochistic bond between the audience and the play. In a masochistic contract, the figure with power is the figure that is being abused; this person is actually the one in control and who dictates how the abuse will take place and what it will consist of. These contracts bind the masochist to fulfill certain conditions and act in a certain way, but the abuser is ultimately the one who is acting and performing for the masochist's benefit. When the play insults and lampoons its audience, it is only upholding its end of the bargain that was made in the induction. Jonson has cast himself, essentially, as the master to the audience's masochist. In this section, I will closely read the induction, and will ask a number of questions about the nature of masochistic spectatorship. What does it mean to watch as a masochist? How can we identify masochistic spectatorship? Does watching a play always carry with it

some masochistic character?

The play begins with a unique induction that cuts off any audience bellyaching: if you do not like the play, or you want to complain about the way that it insults you, the induction will prevent you from voicing your critical opinion. In this opening, two fictional members of the play's production crew, a Book-holder and a Stage-keeper, bicker about how the stage looks and whether or not it would look better with different trappings, and debate what the audience's reaction to the play will be. The Book-keeper worries about what "the understanding gentlemen o'the ground",⁴⁶⁹ crowded right next to the stage, will think of the show, and he admits that the author of the play has the same anxiety. He then states that there are "certain articles drawn out in haste between our author and you, which, if you please to hear, and as they appear reasonable to approve of,"⁴⁷⁰ the play can then proceed with these anxieties assuaged and all parties agreed to how the audience is going to react to what they see. The two company members then introduce a Scrivener onto the stage, who carries a lengthy contract with him. This contract will bind the audience to uphold the response that the playwright expects out of them. In a play that so concerned with contracts, deals, exchanges, and the economic processes that make up life in the city, it might come as no surprise that this is how the play opens: it is an attempt to put into dramatic practice the themes of the play, and it is also an invitation to the audience to participate in the same culture of contracts, agreements, and bargains that will shortly be acted out in the play they are about to see. The expectation, one might assume, is that this will be a funny and light-hearted moment, and that the contract the Scrivener carries will

⁴⁶⁹ *Bartholomew* Induction 48-9

contain a few jokes, some clever turns of phrase, and an enjoyably précis of the proceeding comedy.

This is not, however, what actually happens, and the contract is presented as something extremely severe, formal, and intricate. It begins with language that reads like an actual legal document; the author of the play is clearly taking no chances with whom the contract refers to, and those who agree to it cannot claim that they misunderstood how it was presented. There is something deeply anti-theatrical about the contract, and it is difficult to see what enjoyment or humor an audience member would have found in it. It is boring and official, and it would have been difficult to deliver it in anything other than a listless monotone. It is almost as if the author is preparing for any lawsuits that may result from this play, and wants to make sure that he has taken every possible legal precaution:

Articles of agreement, indented, between the
spectators or hearers, at the Hope on the Bankside, in the
County of Surry on the one party, and the author of
Barthol'mew Fair in the said place and county, on the
other party, the one-and-thirtieth day of October, 1614,
and in the twelfth year of the reign of our sovereign
lord, James, by the grace of God, King of England,
France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith: And of Scot-
land the seven-and-fortieth.⁴⁷¹

This is, without a doubt, a document to take very seriously. The contract is precisely specific to the exact time, place, and location of the play, and it evokes James in order to confirm its solemnity. If this contract were brought up in court, it would certainly be seen as ironclad and incontrovertible. The question to ask, of course, is why the author would require such a precise and specific contract, and why he would want to open his

⁴⁷⁰ Ind. 60-3

comedy with the reading of such an intensely serious document. There appears to be an expectation that something will happen in this play that will call for legal action, or will drive members of the audience to sue the author of the play and his company. This contract, then, will be so thorough and complete that there will be no legal question about who is in the right. The playwright is clearly covering all of his bases; if anything in this play leads to a trial, he and his acting company will certainly not wind up on the losing side. The Scrivener continues to read the document for almost another one hundred lines, and, again, it is difficult to see how this is supposed to entertain the gathered audience. They are instead made the witnesses to a legal proceeding, and the comedy that they have paid to see has been left to the side.

The contract expresses a great deal of anxiety about what the audience will or will not be able to say after the play is over. It states that all members of the audience must agree to “remain in the places their money or friends have put them in”,⁴⁷² and not move about the theater and distract the actors on the stage. The audience must also admit that none of its members can claim “more than he knows”,⁴⁷³ and assert that the play has not accurately represented the fair, that the author has made some error, or that there is something wrong with the play. The audience can also not claim that they understand the play and can decipher its allegorical significance, asserting that they can see “what Mirror of Magistrates is meant by the justice, what great lady by the pig-woman, what concealed statesman by the seller of mousetraps, and so of the

⁴⁷¹ Ind. 64-72

⁴⁷² Ind. 78-9

⁴⁷³ Ind. 117

rest.”⁴⁷⁴ The author states that these claims are nothing more than “inspired ignorance”⁴⁷⁵ and encourages the other audience members to point out whoever makes these assertions; this person will be left to the “mercy of the author”,⁴⁷⁶ who will vehemently ridicule them as a “forfeiture to the stage and your laughter.”⁴⁷⁷ The author will respond to any assertion that his play is faulty with a humiliating and cruel response, and his reaction will be so swift and sharp that the rest of the audience will find it entertaining. The audience may feel uncomfortable, but they will not be able to help laughing at the author’s cutting remarks, and the scene will also serve as a lesson that demonstrates what will happen if anyone who speaks out of turn. This play is not up for debate, and it is not being presented so that ignorant people can comment on it and act like they know what they’re talking about.

The contract goes on to state that any audience member who is willing to “so desperately or ambitiously play the fool as to challenge the author”⁴⁷⁸ about the decorousness of the play’s language will meet the same fate as the patrons who thought that they could reveal some hidden allegory in the play, and the former will be mocked with the very same virulence and nastiness as the latter. The audience is still allowed, of course, to maintain their own “free-will of censure”,⁴⁷⁹ but everyone must be silent as possible, and no one is allowed to express his or her opinion on the play to anyone else; this would spread a kind of critical “contagion”,⁴⁸⁰ and the audience must

⁴⁷⁴ Ind. 146-8

⁴⁷⁵ Ind. 145

⁴⁷⁶ Ind. 150

⁴⁷⁷ Ind. 150-1

⁴⁷⁸ Ind. 152-3

⁴⁷⁹ Ind. 87

⁴⁸⁰ Ind. 99

be careful not to take cues from “another’s voice, or face, that sits by him.”⁴⁸¹ There is also the matter of how much each audience member has paid to enter the play: each person in the audience is permitted an opinion according to the “value of his place”⁴⁸² and can have no opinion that is worth more than that his place cost him. If a person pays “but sixpence at the door”⁴⁸³ and then thinks that he can “censure a crown’s worth”,⁴⁸⁴ he is committing an act that flies in the face of “conscience and justice.”⁴⁸⁵ It essential for everyone in the audience to be completely fair and just to the play at all times, even when (or perhaps especially when) the play is not fair or just to any of them. The play, in other words, is more important than the people watching it; the play is not there to entertain the audience, but instead the audience is there to help and support the play. The play would not exist if not for the patrons willing to pay to come and see it, but this does not mean that attendees should feel too proud of themselves; they should appreciate their position and watch silently while the cast and crew go about work that no one in the audience is going to understand anyway.

This contract establishes that the author of the play is the only figure in the theater with any influence or control, and goes to great lengths to assert that the audience has power only as long as the playwright allows them to have any. He doesn’t even permit much influence from other playwrights, asserting that this play is not going involve the ridiculous “tales, tempests, and such like drolleries”⁴⁸⁶ that other authors use; he is not going to indulge in the simple-minded “concupiscence of jigs

⁴⁸¹ Ind. 100

⁴⁸² Ind. 90

⁴⁸³ Ind. 95

⁴⁸⁴ Ind. 96

⁴⁸⁵ Ind. 97

and dances”⁴⁸⁷ that the audience might be used to seeing in lesser plays produced by lesser writers. There is no room for anyone else to have any authority or impact here. This is the author’s domain, and he has complete command over everything that happens in it – even the way that the audience feels about what they are watching. The contract enables him to insult, offend, and constantly taunt the audience without being confronted; if the audience responds negatively, if anyone is upset by what they hear, they are impeding on the author’s right to decide how the play is perceived and what sort of judgment can be applied to it. The last clause of the contract states that if you are an audience member, you must put your “hands”⁴⁸⁸ together and applaud all that you have just heard, even though you are reminded that “you have preposterously put to your seals already (which is your money)”⁴⁸⁹ and do not have much choice in the matter. The audience is no longer able to vote with their wallets – if they are offended by the play and want to leave, they have already paid for their ticket, and the house has made its money off of them. The author looks on all of these customers with contempt; they are absolutely ridiculous, because they have paid to see his play while thinking that they will be listened to and that their opinion will have some real meaning.

This ultimately leads to a masochistic dynamic between the audience and the stage. In a masochistic contract, the figure with the power is the figure that is being abused; this person is ultimately the only one in control and the master of the situation. The playwright figure in the induction’s contract does not necessarily trap the

⁴⁸⁶ Ind. 132-3

⁴⁸⁷ Ind. 134

⁴⁸⁸ Ind. 159

audience into obeying his will, and it is actually the other way around: this sort of contract is exactly the kind of document that a masochist hopes to encounter, as it will legitimize and cement the structure of his or her desires. If the audience is willing to be humiliated and mocked, and if they might even see this as a titillating and pleasurable form of entertainment, the playwright has locked himself into a situation where he must fulfill all of their expectations. When he cuts down an audience member, when he expresses his bitterness and hostility, when he claims that everyone in the audience is ignorant and ridiculous, he is doing exactly what the audience wants and giving them precisely what they want to hear. The contract does not only bind the audience to fulfill certain conditions – it also demands that the author of the play incessantly maintains the role of the viciously sour abuser who has to pounce on anything that the audience says. The playwright is, therefore, the master to the audience's masochist, and, just as in a masochistic dynamic, he is in a secondary role where the audience calls the shots and actually asks for all of this abuse. The author of the play is not necessarily a sadistic taskmaster, and can instead be understood as a coordinate in the audience's masochistic fantasy. He is the authority figure that the audience can latch onto and blame for abusing them, even though they have themselves agreed to the contract and all the conditions that it asked of them.

There might be, however, the suggestion that Jonson actually places himself in a kind of masochistic role. He knows that his audience distrusts him and even dislikes him, and yet he continues to present his work to them and puts on plays that he is aware will be derided or ignored. Jonson might have realized that *Bartholomew Fair's*

⁴⁸⁹ Ind. 157-8

induction would be chafed against, and that the audience would resent having to agree to terms that are so clearly against them and that place them in such a submissive role. It is almost as if Jonson is intentionally trying to evoke the audience's hatred, and as if he wants to hear these people mutter under their breath and curse his name. This reading has particular merit if we consider the fact that it is Jonson who wrote the contract that begins the play; in this sense, Jonson is more the traditional masochist in this play than the audience. I am not suddenly arguing that the audience is not placed in a masochistic position, or that the induction's contract does not make them into masochists; I want to suggest, instead, that there is a complicated relationship between Jonson and the audience, where both sides of the dynamic might actually inhabit a masochistic role. If we think about the play in this way, *Bartholomew Fair* becomes a striking source for not only discussing masochism, but for considering the deeply tangled relationship between the playwright and the audience.

The structure that I have described in this chapter is exactly how masochism works: the play is filled with humiliating and offensive insults, many of which are directed obliquely or even explicitly at the audience, there is a master figure who appears to control the action, and there is a contract that strictly dictates how all the parties involved will behave and exactly what degradations and insults will be performed. The contract is also very specific about when and under what conditions these insults will be used. If a member of the audience, agreeing to the induction's contract, begins to feel pleasure in being insulted and offended, we might call this a masochistic response. I do not want to claim that every person in the audience was interested in this masochistic dynamic, or that they were even aware that such a

dynamic was present or possible. I argue that the induction's language opens up, at least, the possibility for a masochistic relationship between the stage and the audience. It is not that every audience member participates in this relationship, or that anyone yet has the precise language to fully articulate how they would feel about such a relationship if it were formed; the point is that this way of watching and interacting with a play was now available to anyone who was capable of taking advantage of it or who was interested in exploring these kinds of desires. The play has created an environment for masochistic desire, and the induction has established everything that someone would need in order to involve himself in a masochistic structure. The action of the play itself may not be masochistic, and it may seem at first like a sadistic work, but the induction's contract gives the entire play a masochistic quality. It is not that the characters in the play are masochistic, or that the play depicts masochistic scenes, but that the play invites its audience to watch it and interact with it as a masochistic spectator.

Masochistic Spectatorship

If this is so, what does it mean to be a masochistic spectator? How can watching be masochistic, and is this a dynamic that is entirely unique to *Bartholomew Fair*? Is this something that can be found in other early modern dramas? I have described a number of masochistic scenarios throughout this project, and I have shown the ways that masochistic characters like Jessica, Antonio, and Allwit orchestrate and very precisely stage all of the humiliation and shame that they go through. They are playwright figures, scripting the action that will take place and coercing other people into treating them with a particular form of disdain or cruelty; they are director figures,

arranging the *mise en scene* of the these masochistic events and dictating what the other characters will wear, how they will present themselves, and how they will arrange themselves on the stage; and they are actor figures, performing a role in the script that they have written and all along acting as if they have had nothing to do with its creation. I have not, however, emphasized a fourth role that all of these masochistic characters inhabit: they are, in their own way, audience members, and they often simply sit back and watch what is happening to them, making very little comment or even not interfering at all. The idea of watching as a member of an audience is an essential component of the masochistic experience; it is the perfect subject position from which to assert that you have had nothing to do with the events that are transpiring in front of you, that you are an innocent bystander, and that you are watching out of curiosity or because you have been roped into this situation by something that is beyond your control. You, as an audience member, can claim to be completely passive, and your claim will be borne out – other people are doing the acting, and you do not seem to be doing anything.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica organizes a series of scenes in which she will be able to watch on as other characters humiliate her or abuse and insult her father. I have highlighted her passivity in these scenes, noting how her lack of dialogue requires her to stand back from the action and submissively accept all of the things that the Christian characters are saying about her, her father, and her former religion. I want to emphasize that Jessica is an audience member in these moments, and that she watches and listens to what the other characters are saying without interacting with them or commenting on what they say. She has arranged this situation

for herself, but she has the luxury of sitting back and appearing to simply receive all of this information without needing to admit that she has helped to orchestrate it. The audience watching the play would be able to see Jessica watching on: she is present on the stage in almost all of these scenes where the Christians banter with each other and commiserate with one with one another about how horrible the Jews are, but she has very little to say and nothing to do. If she has no dialogue, she must simply be watching on, and she appears to be an audience member as much as the people who have paid to see the play, patiently waiting to see how all of this will turn out. In the same play, Antonio's situation makes him look even more like an audience member: he watches the events of his trial from the side of the courtroom, seemingly helpless to change what the other characters do or to influence what actions they choose to take. Portia and Shylock are the actors, not Antonio; he can only watch as his fate is decided for him, and he is a merely a spectator off to the side, able to briefly voice his opinion or make an occasional emotional outburst, but not able to actually make an impact.

The same is true of wittols like Allwit from *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*; the entire point of being a wittol is that you can watch on while your wife is with another man. The wittol might not be in the actual bedroom, but he knows the specifics of what is taking place between his wife and her lover, and he can listen to his wife's reports and imagine that he was actually there. I have also, however, shown that it is often true that wittols are physically in the bedroom when their wives are having sex with their lovers; in these situations, the wittol is sometimes tied to a chair or held in place by other participants in the erotic scheme, and in any case is not permitted to intervene or interfere with what is happening in front of him. He must keep quiet, and

can only watch while his wife enjoys herself and thereby humiliates him. In this sense, wittols are similar to the audience of *Bartholomew Fair*; both parties agree to watch something that hurts and embarrasses them, and in either case this is framed as a pleasurable experience. The condition of being an audience member means that you take what is given to you and you do not yourself influence the action; you do, however, have a choice about what you want to watch and how you want to watch it. The figure of the wittol and the audience of *Bartholomew Fair* are both put in a situation where they are forced to watch these events transpire in a certain way, and their ability to criticize or complain has been taken away from them. If we look behind the scenes, of course, we will see the wittol has arranged this whole scenario for himself, and the audience of Jonson's comedy has agreed to the induction's oppressive and intensely restrictive contract. The fact that they agreed to these things before anything happened allows them to disavow any responsibility and to act like passive audience members when the events in question actually take place.

These plays dramatize what it means to watch as a masochist; *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* both directly put characters on the stage who are not only masochists but who also watch on, as audience members, while their masochistic scenarios play out in front of them. I argue that the audience is invited to identify with characters like Jessica and Antonio in these moments, and to see a parallel between their own experience as spectators and the experience of these characters as they watch in their own way. When Jessica stands back from her husband and his group of Christian friends, when she is unable to get through to them and join in as they deliver their invective and accusations, her behavior seems to echo

the audience's own situation – watching the action unfold, commenting occasionally but otherwise unable to actually influence what happens, and generally relegated to another side of the stage, away from the characters who have something to contribute. *Bartholomew Fair* makes this parallel much more immediate, and the audience is directly put into the position that Jessica, Antonio, and Allwit were in during their respective plays. While *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* simply put masochistic characters on the stage (though, of course, this is itself an extremely sophisticated and complex dramatic move), *Bartholomew Fair* reaches across the stage to its audience; the audience, by agreeing to the induction's contract, becomes the most integral element of how the play understands and depicts masochistic desire. In fact, this “depiction” does not take place on the stage at all, and is entirely located in the interaction between the audience and the play that they are watching.

This, in a sense, is the pivotal moment that concludes this project. I have described a number of scenes, characters, structures, actions, and behaviors that characterize the early modern period as a vital moment in the history of masochism. I have attempted, in laying out this argument, to not overstate my case, and to be clear and honest when I make the point that might be debatable or that could be contested. I have tried to point out structures, to give interesting examples, and to draw our attention to the potent relationship between desire and performance. The masochistic characters that I have analyzed are actors and playwrights, but they are also audience members, and the audience members watching these plays can themselves have a masochistic relationship with the stage. It was, therefore, possible for everyone in an

early modern theater to be engaged in a masochistic dialogue. I feel that this is the most significant insight this project offers, and my hope is that this insight allows us a new way to think about early modern desire, both on and off the theatrical stage. I will finally end this project with a conclusion that ties together many of the ideas that I have explored over the last four chapters. What are the threads that link together Jessica, Antonio, Allwit, and the audience of *Bartholomew Fair*? Is there a universal experience of early modern masochism that all of these characters share, or do they each convey a different shade of masochistic desire? Is it even possible to think about sexuality as something that is unified and coherent across all the people who express it and enjoy it, or is sexuality something that is always personal and individual? Is desire something that is too fluid for us to have a coherent theory of it? Is it possible that we can never write about desire in a concrete way? I will deal with all of these questions, and sum up my findings, in the conclusion that follows this chapter.

CONCLUSION

This project has offered a sketch of how masochism developed in the early modern period. I have demonstrated what made early modern masochism work, what social trends it drew from, how it grew, and what was attractive about it. I have discussed masochism from several different perspectives: religious, legal, political, sexual, and textual. I have attempted, in framing my project through all of these perspectives, to emphasize the importance of individual agency and the fact that masochists that are represented in early modern plays are making these choices for themselves. In all of this, I have maintained that the early modern market is a vital foundation for thinking about early modern masochism, and that the market is an essential background for understanding masochistic logic and language. In this final section, I will briefly tie together some of the ideas that I have explored throughout this project, and I will especially concentrate on how the plays that I have read are linked (or are not linked) together. How does Jessica's form of masochism compare with Antonio's? Is Allwit's form of masochistic spectatorship similar to what the audience experiences in *Bartholomew Fair*? Is Antonio something like a wittol, and is there something about Allwit's desires that seems religious or political? This conclusion is an opportunity to work out questions like these, and to consider the universality of the experience of early modern masochism. It might be impossible, of course, to paint a completely coherent narrative that can account for the erotic and personal experiences of all the characters and figures that I have discussed throughout my project. This, however, can be an insight in its own right, and it would suggest just how variable and fluid early modern sexuality – or, perhaps, simply sexuality in

general – can be.

I will begin by summing up some of the claims that I have made in this project. I began the dissertation with two chapters on *The Merchant of Venice*, which was an incredibly rich source for thinking about the combination of pleasure and pain. The first chapter on Shylock's daughter Jessica allowed us to start by approaching masochism from a religious and political angle. This is the way that contemporary critics and writers have traditionally understood masochism; these thinkers often connect masochism to political oppression and ascetic self-abuse. Jessica, it would seem, tracks perfectly with this critical tradition: she is a Jew who becomes a Christian, and an outcast who becomes a citizen, two seismic shifts in identity that completely change her religious and political affiliations. I argued that Jessica uses political and religious narratives for her own purposes; the play strongly suggests that her masochism is a deeply personal choice, and that her masochistic feelings are not merely a response to political forces or religious self-hatred. She may use and take advantage of these social narratives, but they do not overpower her and decide what her desires will be and how they will work. The way that the play actually depicts Jessica and her masochistic desires runs contrary to what many critics have argued about how she feels after she marries Lorenzo and is awkwardly introduced into his circle of Christian friends. This one of the vital insights that I suggested in this project: it is important not to be complacent about something like desire, because it might actually be more complex, tangled, buried, counterintuitive, and difficult to understand than it first appears.

Antonio, in the same play, also uses these social narratives for his own

pleasure. The project's second chapter, which focuses on Antonio, shifts our understanding of masochism to a legal and economic arena. I argued that Antonio casts the early modern court and the early modern market as coordinates in his masochistic scenario; in doing so, he is able to insert himself into a story where he is a helpless object, almost like a sack of goods or a piece of meat, debated over by other people who have the right to decide his fate. He is placed entirely in the hands of these other people, and the courtroom at the end of the play looks as much like a market auction as it does like the setting of a legal trial, as Antonio's helpless body is metaphorically dragged back and forth between Portia and Shylock in a rhetorical tug-of-war. His helplessness is, however, a carefully designed pose, and he has actually orchestrated this entire scenario for himself. In this chapter, I expanded on what it means to exploit a social institution for your own purposes. The early modern court may have been oppressive and often unjust, and the early modern market may have been a volatile and callous forum that lacked any sentiment and was ruled by cold, hard money, but these features also made them susceptible to being roped into a masochistic fantasy. If you can use the court's brutality and the market's viciousness to feel good or to at least experience a very particular kind of pleasure, what happens to that brutality and viciousness? I argued that Antonio's desires are subversive, and that his masochistic story is a disruptive way of claiming agency and personal will in a culture that seemed so repressive and overbearing. Antonio and Jessica take the things that should oppress and crush them, and turn those things into the raw material of an erotic narrative. If they actually do appear to be oppressed and crushed, it is something that they have chosen for themselves, and these institutions lose some of their

authoritarian control.

In the third chapter, I continued to explore how masochism can be subversive, and how it can defy some of the most basic conventions of early modern culture. It may even defy some of the conventions that contemporary critics have often taken for granted about the early modern period, offering us a more sophisticated and nuanced view of what it might have meant to be an early modern person. In this chapter, I focused on the early modern figure of the wittol, the willing cuckold who knows that he is being cuckolded and even eagerly encourages this cuckolding to happen. He often profits from this relationship in a financial sense as well, taking money from his wife's lover and living a life of ease without any responsibilities. The nature of this figure flies in the face of what critics have always assumed about early modern masculinity; the critical commonplace is that early modern men had a violent fear of being cuckolded, and closely watched their wives for any hint that they may be cheating on them. The wittol does not follow this pattern at all, and he actively invites on his head the shame and social humiliation that so many other early modern men worked tirelessly to avoid. The centerpiece of this chapter is a close reading of Thomas Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*; I focused on the character Allwit, an extremely content wittol who happily allows his wife to sleep with another man. Allwit not only profits from this relationship, taking money from his wife's lover, but he also receives a palpable erotic charge from the idea that his wife is cheating on him with a disreputable pimp. Allwit is, like all of the masochists I have discussed in this project, in complete control of his situation, and he has the power to end it whenever he wants. He sets the terms of the relationship between his

wife and her lover, he decides when and how often they meet, and he has the right to cut the lover off if this man does not fulfill his end of the masochistic bargain between them. Allwit and Wittols like him represent an entirely different kind of early modern man – one that subversively takes control by allowing the outside world to think that he has given up any sense of control.

The last chapter turns to the nature of masochistic spectatorship and what it means to watch a play as a masochist or, at least, what it means to watch something in a masochistic way. The other three chapters deal with characters on the early modern stage, but this chapter extends the conversation to include the early modern people who were actually watching these plays. I employed Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* as a dramatic test case for working through this complicated issue. The play itself appears to be extremely sadistic, filled with sharp-tongued characters that prey on the weak and ignorant, and there are even many mean-spirited barbs and nasty insults directed right at the audience watching the play. The masochistic quality of *Bartholomew Fair* can be found, then, in the relationship between the audience and the stage. The play opens with an odd induction that asks audience members to agree to a contract that limits their ability to complain when the play mistreats or insults them. The audience is even expected find the play's insults charming and entertaining; if they feel differently, the induction reminds them that they are too stupid and uneducated to really know any better, and it makes sure that they won't be able to ignorantly speak out and poison anyone else's opinion. The idea of watching as a masochist is a curious concept, and I believe it is one of this dissertation's most valuable insights; in the rest of the fourth chapter, I spoke about what it means to be a masochistic spectator, and I

showed how the other masochists I have discussed in my project are also spectators of their respective masochistic scenes. Jessica watches on as the Christian characters mock and insult her; Antonio watches as his trial proceeds and Shylock and Portia debate over what will happen to his body; and Wittols watch as their wives sleep with other men, or even just watch as their wives talk to these men and flirt with them right under their noses. These characters are playwrights, set designers, stage managers, casting directors, and actors, but they are also audience members who watch the dramas that they have created for themselves.

I have provided this review so that I can talk about the connections between these four chapters. I want to see if we can find the links between these different concepts, and to test whether or not there is a universal thread that runs through these very different configurations of early modern masochism. Is there something similar about Jessica's masochism and the masochism demonstrated by Antonio? It is important for Antonio to be seen by people when he is in a state of pain and shame; his brand of masochism is founded on the idea of others, whether beloved friends like Bassanio or absolute strangers, watching him while he is treated like a helpless animal being led to the slaughter. He is, in this sense, an exhibitionist: he receives an erotic charge when his body is exposed to the public, and the play's depiction of his sexual desire pivots on these scenes of exposure, humiliation, and vulnerability. Jessica, on the other hand, does not want to be seen. It is important for her not to be noticed, to be ignored, and to be treated like she does not exist and like she would not be worth acknowledging if she did exist. Her erotic feelings are grounded in the idea that she is not being watched, and that the people who insult her do not seem to realize that she is

standing nearby (or, at least, that they would not care that she was there even if they did realize it). It seems that, while these two characters thrive on experiencing humiliation and shame, they each require a very different setting to be fully able to appreciate those feelings. If Jessica were constantly noticed and the Christian characters made a point of interacting with her and talking to her, or if Antonio were ignored by the court and the Venetian community, neither would be able to fulfill their masochistic fantasies.

It is not possible, then, to transplant masochists from one context to another. The entire point of their masochistic design is that it has been very specifically created by them and only for them. Jessica cannot suddenly step into Antonio's narrative, and Antonio cannot suddenly step into Jessica's. These contexts are unique and intensely personal. We might compare, to offer another example, Antonio and Allwit. In Antonio's case, what is essential is the fact that he is helpless to stop something that might happen to him. The court may decide that Shylock's contract is completely legal and will be upheld, in which case a pound of Antonio's flesh will be cut off; the court may also decide that the contract is illegal and will not be upheld, in which case Antonio will be saved. Antonio has no choice in the matter, and his body will be cut into or left intact at the pleasure of the law. Allwit's desires, on the other hand, are based on the idea that he is helpless to stop something that explicitly does not happen to him.

The erotic scenario that Allwit has designed for himself relies on his wife sleeping with another man while he seems to be powerless to do anything about it; in other words, this is something that happens to somebody else – his wife and her lover -

and not to him, and his own body is never in any danger or directly involved in the scenario. Antonio's performance of impotence is based on the idea that his body is exposed and vulnerable, able to be touched and mutilated by anyone, while Allwit's performance of impotence is based on the idea that his own body is never actually in play at the pertinent scene of shame, and that he does not physically participate in the moment when his wife cheats on him. These two conceptions of the masochist's body cannot be reconciled; it would not be possible for Antonio to be removed from the courtroom and to have him only hear about what happens in the trial from afar, and it would not be possible to have Allwit engage in some sort of *ménage à trois* with his wife and Whorehound. It is also true that these two characters have a very different relationship to money: Antonio is ashamed because he has lost all of his wealth and property, making him vulnerable, while Allwit is ashamed because he actually gets financial support for being in his humiliating situation. These masochistic narratives exist in their current form for a very particular reason, and altering them or treating them like they have interchangeable ingredients would completely spoil the unique masochistic effect of each narrative.

Bartholomew Fair is an entirely different case altogether; in this play, the masochistic scenario is actually a collective experience, and it is supposed to apply to the wide variety of people sitting in the theater audience. These people are young and old, rich and poor, educated and simple, and the contract needs to establish a relationship with all of them. It is not unique and personal, and it is not specifically sculpted to exploit all of the minute details of a particular individual's religious, political, sexual, or legal contexts. This is a special exception to the masochistic

desires that I have described throughout the rest of this project, and this means that there is something very different about the masochistic dynamic presented in this play. It operates by a different set of rules, and in some ways it is a much different animal than a more traditionally masochistic play like *The Merchant of Venice* or *All's Well That Ends Well*. This does not mean, however, that it is any less masochistic, or that its masochistic qualities are in some way diluted, and it is one of the points of this conclusion to show that there really is no such thing as a traditional form of masochism. The masochism in Jonson's comedy simply works in a different way, which is perhaps necessary given the much larger scale of the participants involved and the fact that this is a mass, communal event instead of the very precise and deeply personal expressions of desire that we have seen staged in the other dramas discussed throughout this project. I will take a moment to outline the differences between *Bartholomew Fair*'s masochistic contract and the types of masochism that we have seen in other early modern plays, and I will conclude with some final thoughts about the relationship between masochism and theatricality.

The audience members of *Bartholomew Fair* do not, first of all, design a masochistic contract for themselves; Jessica, Helena, Antonio, and Allwit are all the very immediate cause behind the masochistic narratives that they perform in, but the audience of this play does not get to create anything for itself. The contract in the induction is, instead, handed to the audience, and they are expected to agree to what the playwright has written for them. The fact that the contract leads to a masochistic dynamic is extremely fascinating and compelling, but it might just have easily led to something that was more sadistic and harmful to the audience. Secondly, most

masochistic narratives involve the masochist being watched by somebody else, or at least being conspicuously ignored by somebody who could watch them if they were so inclined. In the case of *Bartholomew Fair*'s audience, there is no observer who can watch on and look at them with disgusted curiosity. The entire audience is included in this contract, and everyone is equally implicated in the induction's masochistic dynamic. It is not possible for one audience member to turn to another and then shame or criticize him or her, because both of these audience members are equally caught up in the same embarrassing scenario. Antonio needs to have the attendees of the court watching him as he exposes his body; Allwit needs to have the community know what is happening to him and what sort of a relationship he has with his wife and her lover; and even Jessica, though she takes pleasure in being ignored, has to have an audience nearby that she realizes is ignoring her. The audience of *Bartholomew Fair* is not watched by anyone else, and the humiliation of their situation is shared by everyone who is present in the theater; the masochistic structure of this play is, therefore, much more impersonal than that of the other plays I have discussed, and it has a dryer, more legalistic quality to it.

It seems that it is impossible to chart a cohesive impression of how masochism works. These desires are much too fluid and variable, and there are too many ways that masochistic structures can be organized and arranged. It appears that each masochistic desire is unique to the person who designs or orchestrates it, and that it can look very different in each case. The one constant in all of the masochistic scenarios that I have analyzed throughout this dissertation is the emphasis on theatricality and performance. Jessica meticulously costumes herself with jewels so

that she can feel even more ashamed when her father finds out that she has run off with his wealth; the trial scene in which Antonio has to suffer the penetrating stares of the Venetian public is almost designed as if it were set on a theatrical stage, with gathered crowd watching as the principal figures act out a dramatic situation; and Allwit expertly performs the role of the cuckolded husband so that Whorehound can thoroughly believe that he is helpless and impotent. The most explicitly theatrical of the works that I have discussed is, of course, *Bartholomew Fair*, in which the masochistic dynamic of the play is entirely defined by the interaction between an audience and the performers that they are watching. I argue that masochism is not only a vital insight into early modern society, but is a valuable perspective for thinking about the early modern stage. It is a model for watching a performance, and it is a new way of thinking about how one might interact with and experience the emotions of a staged play. It is also, at the same time, a model for understanding oneself as part of a performance, and it suggests that it is possible for everyday life to be a theatrical event that is scripted, designed, directed, and acted. In this sense, studying masochism is as much a contribution to our understanding of theatricality as it is to our understanding of sexuality. I feel that this is my dissertation's most significant insight, and I ultimately hope that the reader comes away from my project with a more sensitive conception of early modern desire and how these desires might be articulated on the early modern stage.

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